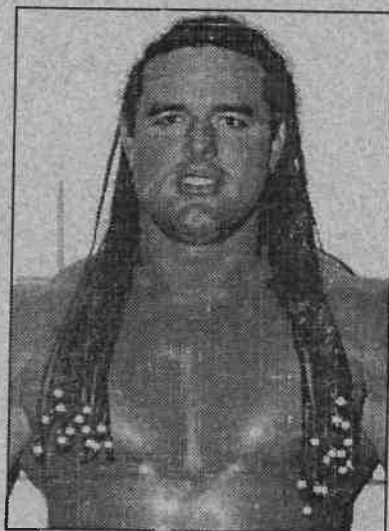
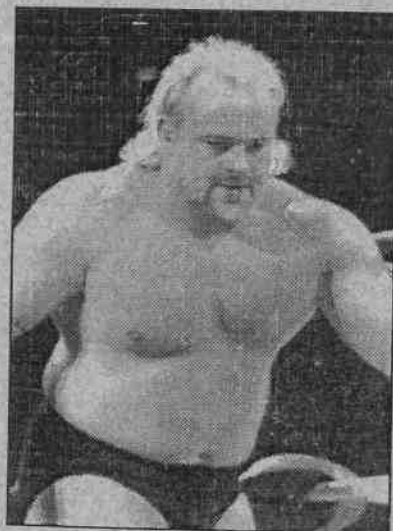
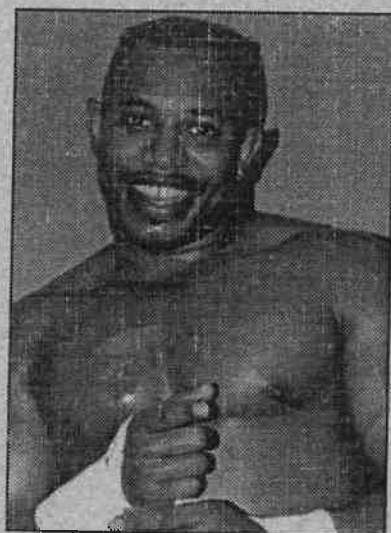
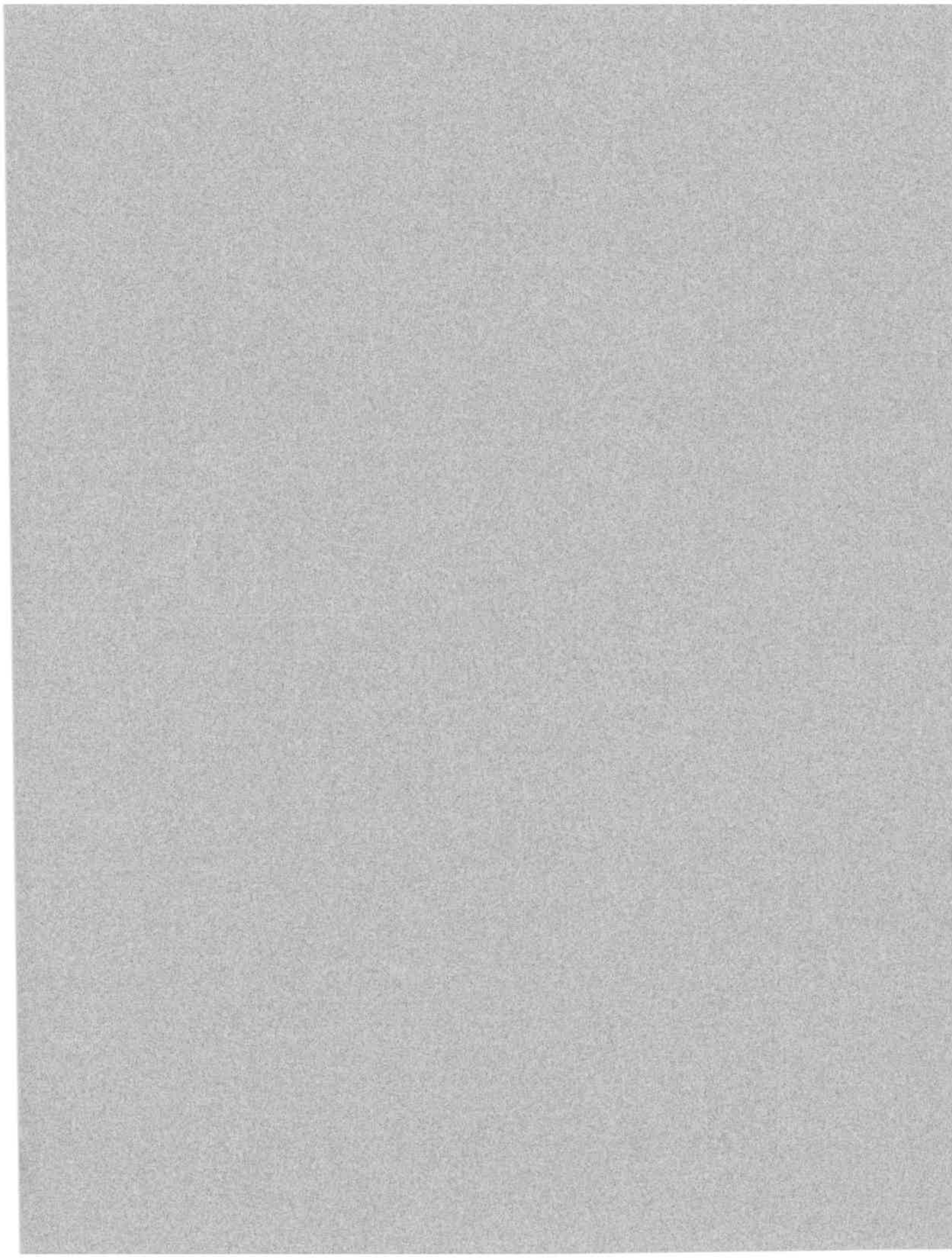


TORCH TALK

COLLECTION

volume three





PRO WRESTLING TORCH PRESENTS
Torch Talk Collection
VOLUME THREE

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Jesse Ventura

Photo by W.K.



JIM ROSS

The following is a "Torch Talk" series with Jim Ross, former lead announcer and vice president with WCW and more recently host of WWF Wrestling Challenge. Ross talks about his departure from WCW, speculates on the impact Hogan would have on WCW, the future of regional promotions, the state of announcing in the United States, the role of color commentators in wrestling, the circumstances surrounding his departure from the WWF, his future in wrestling, the difference working for the WWF versus WCW, and details on how Vince McMahon operates behind the scenes. This interview was conducted May 29, 1994.

Wade Keller: Why did you leave WCW in early 1993 and join the WWF?

Jim Ross: The reason I left was I wanted to continue broadcasting. I wanted to continue working on the air doing play-by-play. Even though I had a great deal of experience working in syndication with Mid-South and the UWF and really didn't have a problem interacting with the stations and so-forth, it was my personal choice to continue my broadcasting career.

Keller: What happened in terms of your reputation during the time you were vice president under Bill Watts?

Ross: My reputation got battered and bruised pretty good.

Keller: Deservedly so or do you believe you were a victim of your circumstances?

Ross: A lot of factors contributed to what happened and I was at fault for a great deal of

them. I don't have a problem accepting responsibility for making some mistakes, which I did. Some of them were not fair. I didn't have any idea when WCW hired Watts that he was even coming in. A lot of people won't believe that. Somebody's probably laughing right now reading this, saying, "He knew everything." That's the honest to God's truth. I had no idea Bill was coming in. Upper-management at Turner had kept it very secret that he was being brought in. Because he gave me my first big break in the business back in the '70s and because I had worked with him hand in glove in the '80s, everybody thought everything would be great for me.

Bill was executive vice president and he promoted me to vice president. I don't think it's because I didn't have the background or the knowledge to do it. Part of being a good manager is being able to delegate and to master time management. I had so much on my plate. I was writing four hours of TV a week. I was helping manage and acting as a talent on the hotline. I was writing a column for the magazine. I was on two or three hours of TV a week. I was doing Clashes and pay-per-views. I was interfacing with syndication and arena bookings. The production guys reported to me. I thought I could do it all. Nobody could do the job as it was structured. Nobody. I allowed too much to be put on my plate. I should have said no. I should have resisted it and didn't.

Also, I didn't do a very good job of commentating with Bob Dhue or Bill Shaw in that when I would make a written report or make a suggestion or enact changes on the TV side, I didn't go past Bill. So, consequently, Bob Dhue and Bill Shaw didn't realize what I was doing on a daily basis. They knew generally, but not specifically. That was my fault. I'm not blaming Bill Watts for that. I should have memo'd those guys. Bill, at the time, was really anti-establishment in terms of memo'ing everybody. He said he would deal with Mr. Shaw and Mr. Dhue. I took his word. He was the boss and he is a very difficult guy to disagree with. That was my fault.

I didn't really know Watts's relationship had deteriorated to the level it had until it was way too late. At that point, the damage had been done. I was basically implicated as part and parcel to his hostility. I wasn't a hostile person. I certainly was not a racist. Bill's views on race and religion and politics are not very akin to mine, I can assure you. I was his guy in the eyes of so many people because he made me vice president. I had as many wars with him as anybody else. I didn't agree philosophically with a lot of the things he was doing. We had private conversations about some of those things we shouldn't have been doing. I wish I had been more assertive. I wish I had delegated more. I wish instead of my doing all of the pay-per-views and Clashes, I think Tony (Schiafone) probably should have done some of them.

It puts you in a tough situation. Bill didn't like (Jesse) Ventura. He didn't like what Ventura was being paid. He thought it was exorbitant for the limited number of days he worked—I think it was 50 days a year or something like that.

Because I was theoretically in charge of that area, I got a lot of flack for that. I didn't negotiate Jesse's deal. As far as I was concerned, it was a done deal. He was here, this is what they were going to pay him, let's try to make the thing work. Any time there needed to be anything confrontational, then it was me doing it, so a lot of the heat came to me. It was under the directive of my supervisor. You either did it or defied a direct order. You do that too many times and you find yourself out the door.

Keller: Why didn't Bill Watts work in that position? Were all of us who endorsed his hiring—you and me included—completely naive to his abilities?

Ross: Bill was fighting some demons of his own. I think he was having some problems in his personal life that he was having a hard time solving. He brought some of those problems to work with him. I think the foundation of Bill's knowledge of the wrestling business is still applicable. I'm talking about work ethic, I'm talking about coming to work and not no-showing, being on time, being straight, doing what you're told to do, some of those basic things are still applicable. What I think was completely overwhelming to him was the system. He didn't fully understand how the corporate system was structured.

For example, you have guys under contract who are making a significant amount of money relative to what old-time wrestlers made and it was all guaranteed. Had it been less money, but still guaranteed, it defies the logic and mindset of the old-timer wrestler because they were always paid on productivity and what they drew. That kept them on their toes. It's like a salesman on commission. He thought wrestlers should be held accountable, where their compensation was based on their ability to draw and their cooperativeness. Some of those principles are still applicable today, but he didn't understand that these guys who are guaranteed money don't have the eye of the tiger sometimes. They have to be motivated in a different manner. They have to be communicated with in a different manner. He didn't want to change the way he had always dealt with wrestlers and office personnel and other people around him. He was impatient and didn't want to go through channels.

His biggest problem was fitting into a corporate environment and more importantly how he treated human beings. He was a very unhappy, very bombastic person at that point in his life. He was always on the edge. That feeling was easily detected by anybody who had to deal with him. It was always a negative environment. McMahon is powerful like Watts was, but he's a lot more subtle. McMahon's good at communicating with the guys by and large to keep them calm. McMahon stays calm most of the time. He's not a yeller and a screamer. Bill is very aggressive. He rarely stays calm, and he has very little patience.

I disagree with people who say he didn't understand the business or who say that wrestling had passed him by. The interaction with people and to fit into an already established corporate structure were his biggest downfalls. I think he would have done fine as far as angles



Jim Ross

and finishes if he would have concentrated on that. Instead, he was trying to do too much.

Keller: To those who say Bill Watts deserved more of a chance, and there are those who say that still today—especially with Ric Flair returning to WCW just as Watts was let go—what do you say? If you were in a hiring and firing position, would you have kept him aboard knowing what you knew then?

Ross: If I kept him aboard, I would have taken him away from everything but wrestling. I would have re-defined his job description to where he was only to work with formatting episodic and compelling television and dealing with talent problems and spending more time with wrestlers, either at TV or on the road or wherever, to give him a chance to sell them on his system and get them on his side.

However, that was knowing what I knew then. Knowing what I found out after I left, I think he probably got as much time as he deserved. I knew how he talked to me and the language he used at me regarding some of the people I worked with. When you hear all those stories and you hear the new ones, it was over for him.

Keller: Is there another run for Bill Watts in some form in the wrestling industry or is he pretty much done?

Ross: I think he's done. I think wrestling for him is just a memory. I don't think he wants to do it anymore. He wants it to be the old way. It's like wanting basketball to go back to the way it was before free agency, when a team like the Boston Celtics stayed in tact for years and years. But the next company that forms a team, rather than a collection of individuals—and convinces its wrestlers that there is long-term planning and structure to what they're doing—is going to be successful. The trend right now is more individualistic. The guys are more concerned with their own futures than their opponent, their friends, or the company on a whole. The team pride is hard to create.

Keller: From the outside looking in, how do you think Eric Bischoff has done over the last year as vice president?

Ross: He inherited a big mess. I think almost the first year you have to throw out in terms of making progress forward because he had so many bridges to repair. He had to get his system in place. I'm not that close to what they're doing to know if he has his system completely in place or not. If you take into consideration the shape of the company when he inherited it, I think he has done a very admirable job. From casual observation, I don't believe he has his system completely as he wants it yet. No matter who you are, sometimes you have to just go through trial and error. You think this guy can get this particular job done and you think this guy can do this, and you give him a chance to do it and some get the job done and some don't. It seems now Eric knows the system he wants to put in place.

As long as Eric is in the position he is in and he can be the guy who motivates his booking committee to get projects done ahead of time or do long-term planning, WCW finally has

somebody who does have some wrestling knowledge, but is more of an organizer than they ever had before. Kip Frey was a really nice guy, but he didn't know anything about wrestling. Jim Herd had his good points, but he also didn't know a lot about wrestling. He knew enough, as some have said, to be dangerous. His forte was in marketing and syndication and things of that nature. Dealing with TV stations on a local basis, he was very good at that.

Then Watts came in and he had a wealth of knowledge in wrestling, but he had very few people skills and he didn't fit into the corporate structure. Now you've got Eric, who's got great organizational skills. He seems to fit very well in the corporate structure, he seems to know exactly where he wants to go, and he has enough wrestling knowledge to not be lost. He just needs to be given the time to get his system in place and make the changes he wants. Then he will see if the people he has delegated know what they're doing. Some will be in over their heads and others will be pleasant surprises.

Keller: What do you think he's done well so far?

Ross: I think one of the first positive things he's created is a much healthier work environment. That's very positive. That's the first battle you win, getting everybody on the same page. I know he puts the company first, and others follow. He works a lot. He's created a great work atmosphere, which they haven't had before. With Herd, Herd could be very bombastic at times and very gruff to some people.

Kip Frey was very low key, but he couldn't exude confidence, that this was the guy who understood the product enough to take us where we wanted to go at that time. Of course, then Watts came in and ruled with an iron hand. Then Eric followed and he's created a very positive work environment, which he had to do first, and I think he has a good ability for long-term planning. The concept for the 13 weeks of TV, whether it's good or bad being 13 weeks ahead, I know financially speaking as far as raw production costs, it was a very wise move.

Keller: Do you look at it as a bad sign that Hogan's appearances on WCW Saturday Night haven't led to increases in TV ratings and in fact ratings have dropped?

Ross: I think it's too early to tell.

Keller: Eric Bischoff said, partially in reference to TV ratings not jumping up when Hogan appeared on WCW Saturday Night, that it takes a year for changes in television content to be reflected in TV ratings. If that is true, then why did WCW ratings increase significantly every time WCW aired an old match with Flair when Flair was still wrestling for the WWF about 18 months ago?

Ross: Flair was already established with WCW's audience and he's also a big time player. Flair and Hogan are the two closest guys on that one level that there are. Hulk's appearances have been basically interviews from the same location, so we've only seen one dimension of him. Hulk has to get involved in a

I didn't really know Watts's relationship had deteriorated to the level it had until it was way too late. I was basically implicated as part and parcel to his hostility. I wasn't a hostile person. I certainly was not a racist. Bill's views on race and religion and politics are not very akin to mine, I can assure you.

program, not only verbally involved, but emotionally and physically involved. At that point it can be judged better.

I talk to people all the time and some say Hulk's gonna be great for WCW and some guys say he won't help. I think it's gonna help. We're all gonna look at the obvious numbers: did it increase buyrates, arena attendance, syndicated and cable ratings—all things that are measured and we are privy to. But we don't know what it's worth if he shows up on David Letterman or Jay Leno or Larry King or Regis & Kathy Lee and says he's going to work for Ted Turner's WCW. That's hard to measure in dollars and sense. Will his involvement with Turner's WCW make it to *People* magazine or *US* magazine or *Entertainment Weekly*.

What I'm saying is with Hulk being involved with WCW and Ted Turner, then I think the value of what he will bring in recognition and getting WCW's name out there to a new audience is hard to measure in dollars and sense. The other stuff we're gonna see, the measurable numbers, but we can't judge that until he gets involved. Right now he's just talking. He hasn't done an interview from Center Stage, he hasn't done an interview in front of a crowd, from what I've seen. Once he gets in the heat of battle and starts promo'ing a specific match and a specific time and a specific opponent, then we'll start seeing if it's going to work to the degree that they want it to. In the mean time, until those things come about, the other media exposure he's gonna get for the casual guy—not the big wrestling fan, but the guy who knows who Hulk Hogan is—that's gonna increase perception. It's like the increased perception they received when Bobby (Heenan) and Gene (Okerlund) came aboard, even back when Jesse (Ventura) came aboard. All of that was good for WCW. Whether it was good enough compared to their respective salaries you can't tell. I happen to feel all of those were good moves because of public perception.

Keller: Where do you see the wrestling industry in one year, about the same or

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substantially different?

Ross: I think it will be a lot different. I think it's in for another interesting year of changes. I think different philosophies have to be instilled in formatting shows. I think the show has to have more entertainment content. I'm not talking Doink and Dink entertainment, I'm talking about more live interviews. I think interviews in front of the audience is sorely missing in all of the shows. I know some things have to be pretaped, but I would try to always, when I'm formatting a show, I would think you'd always want to have on a two hour program at least one or two good hot interviews at ringside or in front of the people. You don't see the wrestlers anymore have a match and leave the ring and go right to the announcers where they're hot and pumped up. I guarantee, you talk to the wrestlers and most of them would much rather do an interview right then when their adrenaline is pumping as opposed to a sterile environment. The guys who are great interviews will give you fine interviews in a tape room, but the guys will also give you superb interviews if they're in front of the people more often than not.

Keller: Do you see the power structure the same one year from now with two national promotions, a few regional promotions, and dozens of small independents?

Ross: I think with the TV marketplace changing like it is that there is certainly room for a third national group.

Keller: What would make you say that?

Ross: Everything is changing. You've got CBS losing affiliates to Fox, you have Fox becoming more aggressive. One would think a network could see the success of wrestling in syndication over the years and the other possibilities for generating revenue in pay-per-view and other areas. If a network got involved in wrestling, obviously you wouldn't have trouble getting clearances. So all of a sudden your syndicated clearance list is strong

overnight. Then, if that network has a way of leveraging its product on cable, maybe a remixed product or new product—that's more likely than one would assume because so many cable stations are going up and they need programming.

I would think there is a place for a third wrestling company if it is in association with a television network. None of us know what will happen with all of the changes in network television. I do think it would be difficult for a company to have private funding and make its way into the business with any impact unless you do it on a regional basis, much like Smoky Mountain where you are going to cater to a smaller condensed geographic area. Territories may pop up with the right kind of management and the right kind of contacts with stations in the market and running a small territory, but nationally, there is a possibility of it happening with a TV network.

Keller: All that being said, do you put any stock in the doomsday theories that the wrestling industry as a major entertainment force in this country is going the way of roller derby?

Ross: I don't have that mindset at all. Roller Derby never had syndicated ad sales like wrestling. Roller Derby never had pay-per-view revenues. Think about the business and how it's structured in the pay-per-view industry. It's an unfair comparison.

Wrestling is not going away. Because of the need for programming, because of the changes of the guard at networks and independent stations, and because cable is becoming a way of life. And wrestling is inexpensive to produce. You don't need to have a huge business. It can be produced indoors and outdoors, in big arenas and small studios.

Keller: Where do the regional promotions fit into this picture? Can many regional promotions survive when there are national companies with bigger budgets on national TV?

Ross: The key to a territory surviving is its television. Jim Cornette is a brilliant guy and I think you would be hard pressed to find people who are more creative than he is and more innovative. He has some very unique views on politics and a lot of things, but I'm talking wrestling. The heartbeat of Smoky Mountain, no matter how smart Cornette is, if he loses his TV clearances, nobody's gonna see his angles or hear his interviews. So I think a regional promotion can work if they get personal relationships with the TV stations in their region and get more local involvement such as local car dealership sponsors like Cornette's doing. TV is the key. If you have the expertise to get yourself on television, wrestling can be produced without the most glitzy truck and with only two or three cameras. With new technology with lightning, it's not that expensive so there's no excuse to not have good lighting. With TV clearances, any territory has a chance to survive.

The problem regional promotions have is once a guy gets over, once a guy perfects his gimmick, he's gonna jump to the WWF or

WCW. Look at the relationship between Smoky Mountain and the WWF. Jim Cornette is getting a payday out of it, as are The Heavenly Bodies and Brian Lee. But what has the WWF given them in return. What regular piece of talent that can draw money has been sent to Smoky Mountain to work an extended period of time for six weeks or a summer? None. That's the downside.

The upside is you can run a lower end economical territory as long as you keep your stations happy and run local promotions. It's a great place for guys to come and learn. Cornette's in a real advantageous position. He has an open communication with the WWF.

If I'm an independent guy, a young wrestler with talent, and I don't know where I'm gonna go work and I've got a chance to work for Smoky Mountain because I want to some day hit the big time, I'm gonna go work for Smoky Mountain because he has access to McMahon and the WWF. Plus, you're gonna work regularly and you're gonna work longer matches and learn the psychology of things. But if you do well, you get recognized by McMahon and it creates an opportunity.

I think there may be some other territories springing up. I don't know why nobody's running Texas. You could run one state. Look at all of the TV markets in Texas, for example. My old state of Oklahoma used to be great for wrestling. Nobody runs Oklahoma anymore. Outlaw groups run a spot show now and then with two or three hundred people. That doesn't really count. In the old days, the Von Erchs made a ton of money in Texas. There was a West Texas territory with Dory Funk Sr. There was Paul Boesch who made a hell of a good living running Houston and that area. Then Joe Blanchard had a territory out in San Antonio. At one time, there were four different offices in that state. Last I heard, those towns are still out there. If somebody in Texas had expertise and had contact with a syndicator that really was well connected in that state, then you run a pilot, hand it to a syndicator, and off you go. It's feasible, it's possible, I don't know if somebody's going to do it. I'm using Texas just as an example. There are a lot of opportunities.

Keller: Changing gears, what is your opinion of the current quality of play-by-play announcing compared to when you first entered the wrestling industry?

Ross: When I entered the business, there were probably a lot more competent guys than there are now because there were more places to work and more territories that were doing TV on a weekly basis. That's a problem in the WWF as far as announcers. There is Vince and next in line is Stan Lane, trying to learn on the job. He's trying hard, but it's not something you just walk in, sit down, and start doing overnight. For some reason Vince has never really been comfortable the last few years in a prime play-by-play role for whatever reason. Basically, you've got Vince doing everything that's important and everything else is pretty much a mop up.

Keller: What are some of the poor habits of announcers today that you from your

experience notice?

Ross: Big show preparation is a deficiency. I think whenever you have dialogue that doesn't match what you're seeing for extended periods of time, it's a distraction. I think you have to approach every match as if it were a shoot. Sometimes you see things that are funny, but you can't laugh, you have to bite your tongue. You don't want to outwardly laugh, especially when something going on in front of you is pretty damn serious. I think being able to include a little bit of the heritage and history of the individuals that the viewers are seeing makes it more human, makes wrestlers more real. If it fits the storyline, add details about whether they're married, went to college, what their hobbies are, what titles they've held, just basic background. Let them be real people. That's not focused on enough.

I think we all, including me, went through an era—and we're still in it—because the houses are less productive and the companies are dependent on some other ancillary revenue areas, be it hotlines or magazines or merchandise or videos, these other avenues are sold and pitched during a wrestling match. I just don't think it's a smart way of broadcasting when people are hearing things that are completely unrelated to what they are seeing. I think all wrestling companies need to evaluate that.

Keller: You've worked with some of the more prominent color commentators during your years announcing, including Bobby Heenan, Paul E. Dangerously, Jesse Ventura, Jim Cornette, Michael Hayes, Bill Watts, and others. Taking all of those experiences with various color commentators into account, what role should a color commentator play during a wrestling match? What has worked best for you?

Jim Ross: The good color guy is succinct, proficient at getting his points across without a long, drawn out dissertation. He is not talking or rambling trying to make a point during a pinning predicament or during a change of pace of fast movement in the match. He has to pick his spots in order to make his point. He has to understand a match and understand how a match is being wrestled. It's so predictable that the color guy normally is an ally of the (heels) and sometimes when the (babyface) makes a great move, it gives the color guy credibility. There are a lot of ways to lend credit to a move, by saying "The Scorpion Death Lock is one of the most devastating things I've seen, but I tell you this, he couldn't do it to Vader." That's why I say preparation is so important. The color guy is in and then he's out. They're there with viable information, then they're gone. You have to be mentally in the game to do your job as the color guy. And don't be predictable.

Keller: What led to your departure from the World Wrestling Federation?

Ross: The basic thrust of it was Vince was interested in me becoming a character, much like many of the wrestlers and was very sure that if I would don a cowboy hat and a western jacket and a string tie that I would be more marketable and would be more effective to him and his

product by being this character. I felt very uncomfortable about doing it. It came to an impasse since I wasn't interested in doing that. I guess he perceived that as not being loyal and not being totally committed to his product, so on Feb. 11 he called me to his office and let me know he had decided to go a different direction with his announcing and I would not be in those plans and that my contract would not be renewed when it expired at the end of March.

Keller: Did you getting Bell's Palsy, which paralyzed half of your face, have anything to do with the way you were treated by the WWF or your departure from there?

Ross: Well, the way the sequence of events came about is that on Super Bowl Sunday morning, Jan. 31, I woke up with Bell's Palsy and the left side of my face was completely paralyzed and my left eye wouldn't blink. My jaw was hanging. About two-thirds of my mouth was like when you go to the dentist and numbed up. I didn't have control over my lip. My ears were ringing. Half of my tongue was numb. I thought when I woke up and staggered into the bathroom, which is normal for me in the morning, I looked into the mirror and it was a much worse sight than I was used to seeing. It really scared me when I touched my face and couldn't feel anything. I thought I had a stroke; I had the same basic symptoms. That was on Jan. 31. Along with this, because of the nerve damage, I was having horrific headaches.

I went to the emergency clinic and then saw a doctor. I was having these horrible headaches in February and was staying in bed most of the time. I had trouble with my vision. I was drooling like a child. I was very self-conscious of it, quite frankly. I was taking medication for the headaches and antibiotics because at first they thought I had Lyme's Disease, which I didn't, thank goodness. I was getting ready to see a neurologist about the second week in February, in fact it was Feb. 10, and I'll never forget it—there's some significant things you always remember in your life—it was snowing like crazy and it ended up snowing the next two or three days. But they called me from the WWF office—someone from human resources called and said they wanted to continue my talks about resuming my contract on Friday morning in Vince's office.

I had been talking to Lisa Wolf, who's the head of human resources, and J.J. Dillon, who's the vice president of wrestling administration there, about my contract. We had some very nice talks, some very pleasant talks, and both of those two people are very quality people. When they called me on Thursday, I was a little bit alarmed because I was in bed and I was sick and I really didn't want to get out in the snow, but I did.

I drove to the office the next day. It was about 12 miles from where I lived to the office and it took about an hour to get there. It was just horrible, horrible driving conditions. So when I got there, the whole meeting took about five minutes, maybe ten. The drift of it is Vince said he appreciated all I had done for him, he appreciated my hard work, but he decided to go a different direction with his broadcasters and that I was not in those plans and, finally, that he

would not be renewing my contract when it expired. That's how it all came about. I hope the Bell's Palsy wasn't a factor. I don't think Vince is that cold-hearted that he would let me go because I was ill.

If there was anything negative about the whole situation, it is I feel like it could have been handled a little bit more timely when I was feeling better and when I could actually go in and communicate with him, where I could carry on a conversation without being constantly wiping my eye or my mouth. I thought the timing was a little ill-fated.

Keller: Do you think that was Vince flexing his muscles of power or was that Vince not really knowing the entire situation? What do you deep down believe?

Ross: Well, you try to look for the good in people. I'd like to think he wasn't aware of how seriously ill I was at the time. He, I guess, has been known to flex his muscles from time to time. He is a very powerful man in our business and I don't think he was too pleased with me refusing to become a character. It was portrayed to him by someone in his company that I was adamant about it, that I was cursing and appalled. That was completely misrepresented.

I just didn't understand the reasoning for it. One week I'm one way, the next week, I'd show up on TV with this Porter Wagoner outfit. I didn't understand the reason behind it.

Keller: Given that this is the wrestling business and so many people start out being themselves but then become characters—for instance, Ted DiBiase became the Million Dollar Man, and Curt Hennig became Mr. Perfect—were you nonetheless completely dead set against changing your on-camera image or was it specifically this character that bothered you?

Ross: It was the character that bothered me. I wouldn't have minded being more outspoken, more controversial. I didn't mind doing more home-spun phrases and Oklahoma-like analogies. The attire they wanted me to wear, I was uncomfortable with that. I know being from Oklahoma and being from the Southwest for a lot of my life that everybody doesn't wear a cowboy hat, and everybody's not a devious J.R. Ewing-like character.

Keller: Isn't that where Vince has made his mark as a promoter, by picking up on stereotypes—sometimes harmful, usually harmless stereotypes—and exploiting them or featuring them.

Ross: He sure has done a great job with that. It may have worked for me, too. It may have worked very well. He told me I need to put my career entirely in his hands and if I went along with it, I would be the most featured broadcaster he ever had and it would be the best thing that ever happened in my career, there would be a lot of extra stuff to do. He said he would go all the way with the situation and I'm sure he meant it. I'm sure he was very much certain the scenario would work.

Keller: So you don't look at it as Vince

McMahon trying to humiliate you given the strong stance you've taken in the past about not wanting to be involved in wrestling angles?

Ross: I think he thought it would be good for business. I think he thought it was going to be good for the company. He knew my views of wrestling. I travelled with him a lot when I first got there. I worked with him at his home on several occasions and got to know him quite well. It was kind of a crammed course in my early going there. I would like to think he had it strictly in mind for business and I would hope it wasn't because he knew he would be exerting his power.

Keller: You sound like you haven't ruled out other motivations?

Ross: Well, I'd like to, but it's hard to.

Keller: Another time I interviewed you for a "Torch Talk," one thing you said you would never do is get involved in participating in angles, a la Gene Okerlund teaming with Hulk Hogan or Lance Russell getting into a battle of wits with heels on the USWA programs. Are you too much of a traditionalist? Are you trying too hard to be a straight broadcaster in a sports theater that doesn't have a lot of room for that or is there still a place for that philosophy?

Ross: I admire Lance and I'd like to think I've had my share of arguments and on-camera debates with talent on many occasions and enjoyed that. The only thing I ever said was fans tune on TV to enjoy wrestling and understand storylines. The wrestlers are the stars of the show. The wrestlers should be the ones who are featured. The wrestlers should be the ones who get the focus. It's our job as broadcasters to try to establish their characters and document their athleticism, to let people understand how this wrestler fits into the grand scheme of things at that given time. Nobody's gonna pay to see me wrestle. I wouldn't. I don't even want to think about seeing me in tights.

I'm not saying Gene Okerlund was wrong in doing the angle with Hulk. It worked, it drew a big house in Minneapolis and Gene was a very well-established personality in Minneapolis and he was comfortable doing it. It's just a personal preference that I would not be comfortable getting into a fist-to-cuffs with a wrestler or getting attacked. I've been grabbed before and shoved around several times, but it wasn't to be involved in the angle.

My stance maybe is a little bit more traditional than it should be. I just want to come prepared, I want to do the best job I can at explaining the angle, calling the action, and trying to keep everybody calling the action on the same page. I think that's what I bring to the table as opposed to trying to become part of the show.

Keller: What are your options now in terms of announcing? Is it possible you will go back to the WWF? Is a return to WCW right around the corner? Will you do part time work with other promotions?

Ross: I'm not ruling out any options. It will be probably the end of June or maybe the middle of July before the effects of Bell's Palsy are

completely healed. Right now I'm working on a mail order business and I'm sending out demo tapes and resums. I'm networking with a lot of broadcasters that I've met over the years in radio and television. I'm looking at the possibility of doing some automotive commercials. I've got a lot of pitches out and I've had a lot of conversations with various people in the media, but it's all on hold until I get well. I don't know what I'll be doing come the end of summer. I believe there will be a lot of options I'll be excited about exploring.

I may be doing some radio and there's a possibility of doing some freelance wrestling announcing. That's all predicated on when I get healed.

Keller: What promotions have you talked to about doing announcing?

Ross: I've had casual conversations with some Japanese people about doing some commentary on some tapes. I've had some conversations with ECW. I've had some conversations with Smoky Mountain. They've just been casual up to this point. All of those parties right now know I'm not quite ready to get back into the mix. I want to keep my options open in terms of going back and doing wrestling, but because I had more name value in wrestling and knew the decision-makers in the various companies, it was a pretty quick deal to let people know I was interested in doing some work. I've spent a lot of time networking in non-wrestling businesses because the wrestling business itself is a quick study. Vince McMahon knows I'm available. The folks at WCW know I'm available, as do the independents.

Keller: Would there be any politics that would prevent you from going back to WCW, especially looking at the words exchanged between you and Jesse Ventura last year on the 900 numbers and radio shows?

Ross: I don't think if it was decided by WCW management to bring me back that there would be a problem. I think some of that political stuff is overblown. I think it makes for good ink sometimes and good hotline discussions, but I don't think it's as bad as it was presented at various times.

Keller: You could walk into CNN Center and shake hands with Tony Schiavone and Jesse Ventura and work with either of them?

Ross: Oh, yes, absolutely. The thing about it is I was in a very unique position the last nine months I was with WCW. If I had it to do over again, I would make some changes and do things differently. As far as Jesse's concerned, I never said that Jesse Ventura wasn't a good color guy. The only point I've ever made—and maybe I was wrong in making it—my personal observation was he didn't seem to be extremely prepared to go on the air. But that was being prepared to my standards, knowing the backgrounds of wrestlers and the reasons matches were taking place and interesting facts about the guys' careers. I wanted to be more prepared for it.

Keller: How was announcing in the WWF different from announcing in WCW?

Ross: The primary difference is in the way you

are produced and in production aspects. WCW has one edit suite in house, a very small studio that's very difficult to do things in. The WWF, on the other hand, has three edit suites and a huge studio where you could set the ring up and have a studio show. The facilities allow for the WWF to be more efficient in producing television than do the facilities at WCW.

WCW may have changed this, but I know when I was there, there was no one with the knowledge of the directions they were going and the viable points that must be included—there used to not be anyone there to listen to the commentary. Basically, you were fending for yourself as the old saying goes. Any talent on any level cannot be as effective without a producer as with a producer. Maybe out of that mindset is where I really started preparing, maybe out of self-defense to be sure I did the things I was instructed to do, be it a mandate to plug the 900 line, the magazine, the pay-per-view, a big grocery list of items.

They provided us in the audio booth with all of the announcer notes we should get in. Basically they would leave it up to us—when I was working with Bobby Heenan—to get them in. The producer would basically check things off as we went. If we forgot to mention the magazine coming out Tuesday, we'd be reminded to get it in on the next match.

Keller: Compare the WWF's booking to WCW's in terms of long-term planning. At what point in your final few months with the WWF did Vince McMahon know what he was headlining at Wrestlemania X?

Ross: Vince had a real good idea of what he wanted to do at Wrestlemania probably within a couple of weeks after Wrestlemania IX.

Keller: Do you think that plan changed a lot or do you think he was able to pretty much stick to what he planned?

Ross: I think he pretty well stuck to his gameplan with some modifications of course that are inevitable due to defections or injuries.

Keller: At Wrestlemania IX, Hulk Hogan was still a part of the promotion and he didn't know what Hogan's status would be a year from then. Then Luger went through a quick change from heel to babyface. So, do you think Luger ended up taking Hogan's spot in the Wrestlemania plan or do you think Hogan's departure led to a whole new concept for Wrestlemania around July when Hogan left the company?

Ross: I think if Hulk had stayed in the WWF, he obviously would have been a major part of Wrestlemania X, to what level or what degree, I don't know. I'll guarantee you right now he has a very good handle on what he's gonna do at SummerSlam and he's got a working knowledge of Survivor Series, I will assure you. And because Wrestlemania is the focal point of his promotion, he's already got some thoughts compiled on what Wrestlemania could potentially be next year. He's really brilliant at that. The thing about it is he's the boss and he doesn't have a problem making a decision. When he makes a decision, everybody in the company tries to make

it happen. He decides the direction, he decides who's getting pushed, and once that direction is established, everybody in the WWF basically works together to make sure that Vince's wishes are fulfilled. So the advantage the WWF has over a lot of other places is that they have one guy who's in charge and he establishes direction and then everybody else who works under him in their various pecking orders—whatever their job description is—they do what they can to make sure the direction works. They're pretty good at keeping you informed at where they are going. They're pretty good about that, so you kind of have a pretty good idea. Sometimes the flow of information in any wrestling company seems to be a problem from time to time. The WWF, though, seems to keep the production guys informed of what's going on so everybody stays on the same page.

Keller: How far down on the card from the main event and a couple of other high profile matches does he go? Do you think he has a pretty good idea of not just the last couple of matches in King of the Ring, but the entire set-up leading to it? Is he already thinking about the first and second matches at Wrestlemania?

Ross: I think he thinks more in terms of the most marketable matches. He knows who he wants in the finals of King of the Ring and how he wants to come out of it and through the course of the thing what other issues they want to establish, other marriages they want to underscore. He's a brilliant guy when it comes to long term planning. He really can look down the road and envision a particular scenario or match and then work toward it.

I thought they did an excellent job of making Lex Luger special as a babyface with the Lex Express tour. That was a very exhaustive, expensive, yet exciting bus tour that garnered a lot of local ink and was a very well thought out and very strategically planned promotional tool to give Lex Luger the opportunity to interact with the fans and become a fan favorite. I thought it was very, very well done. That's what Vince has a great fit at. When he sees something in his mind that he wants to do and he thinks it through and he acts on it, it really has helped him over the years in establishing a direction and working toward it without a lot of interruption.

Keller: In your opinion, do you think that everything worked out as well as Vince had hoped with the results of the Lex Express tour or do you think he was disappointed with the interest and reaction to Luger after the mega-push?

Ross: I think if Vince had total confidence in Lex as a fan favorite, then I think he would have probably been champion at Wrestlemania. I think Lex is a very gifted athlete, but I think he's probably more comfortable working (as a heel). That's just my personal observation. I may be totally wrong. But you have some real strong babyface presence there with Bret Hart and The Undertaker. And the WWF has done a good job getting those fellas over and they're both extremely, extremely talented. So there was a log jam up there. When Hulk was hot, there were

other things underneath him, but the focus was definitely on Hulk. And it wasn't fragmented. There was a singular focus. There was a star of the show.

Right now, Bret Hart is the focus of the show and when Undertaker comes back full time he's gonna be the star of the show. They have a different structure now. They don't have a singular focus. They're trying to create some star-quality, not only at the top of the roster, but down at least to the mid-card level. Heretofore, when Hulk was at his apex with them, he was the singular star of the show. No other single guy can be considered more responsible for making the WWF what it is than Hulk Hogan. The only other guy close to making it what it is is Vince.

Keller: Do you think the WWF considers the Lex Express tour a failure, or do they think, my gosh, it's a good thing we did that or the fans would even be less into Lex?

Ross: I don't think they look back on it with any apprehension. I think it was a good thing. I think they think it was a good thing. It made for some very interesting TV. It was a different look, it was a different presentation. I think it showed great production qualities, it showed they were out hustling, they were getting tape all over the country, hustling it back, FedEx'ing it back, getting it back to the studio so it could be put in the shows. They really worked hard at keeping everybody informed of where the Lex Express was going. I think it was a well-thought-out promotion.

If nothing else, if it didn't work as well to position Lex where they may have wanted him, it still helped create a grass-roots awareness of the World Wrestling Federation in a lot of cities. That bus rolled thousands and thousands of miles. It was like a rolling billboard. I don't think it was a loser in the overall scheme of things. If you only focus on: Did it successfully position Lex Luger to take Hulk Hogan's place? Well, it may not have worked if that's the only thing you're looking at. But they were doing it for more than that one particular aspect. As I said before, I don't think that was the motive at all. I don't think Vince ever envisioned Lex taking Hogan's place. I think that is impossible. More time has to go by before this one guy comes in who you'll want to build the whole promotion around. I'm not sure any promotion will ever build their entire promotion around one guy again. I think they're trying to build the WWF as being multi-dimensional.

Keller: Let's talk about Vince McMahon specifically. How does the level of respect Vince McMahon shows his employees differ from WCW's management treatment and respect shown employees?

Ross: I think that WCW seems to have less pressure and the people on the upper-management level seem to deal with less intimidation and fear. Vince strikes a very imposing figure. He's a big guy. There's no doubt in anybody's mind who the boss is. There's no doubt in anybody's mind who the booker is or who's gonna determine this or that. He's got a great deal of respect in his company. I think a lot of it is because some people know him

Vince was interested in me becoming a character, much like many of the wrestlers and was very sure that if I would don a cowboy hat and a western jacket and a string tie that I would be more marketable and would be more effective to him and his product by being this character. I felt very uncomfortable about doing it. It came to an impasse and he fired me.

really well and like him, other people's respect is based on fear and intimidation.

I think at WCW the guys that are in upper-management seem to be a little bit lower key. They're obviously not as flamboyant. Vince is an entertainer, he's a personality. He is a very outgoing, very gregarious fella and I think some people are comfortable by it, but there are others who are very intimidated. He hires you and he fires you.

Keller: What were your early dealings with Vince McMahon like last year and how were they different than what you expected?

Ross: I had never met Vince before until I went up there for an interview. I never met him in my career. I only talked to him on the phone once and that was when I was working at Mid-South. It was about talent, not about working there. When I met him I really didn't know what to expect. I found him to be a very good conversationalist, I found him to be very intelligent, I found him to be highly motivated, highly confident in his abilities. He told me when he hired me he didn't want me to change, he loved my style the way it was. He was excited about my concept for starting a radio network. It was a very positive situation at that point. He could be down to earth if it was just him and me one on one. He had the ability to be a down to earth guy. He's in a high profile, high pressure situation. When I got there the grand jury was subpoenaing witnesses and all that stuff was going on. In the face of all those challenges, I tell ya' it was amazing how positive he did stay. All in all, it's hard to figure the guy out. He does have a lot of very good qualities. Like a lot of people who have been in wrestling, I don't think he trusts many people.

Keller: You don't think he trusts many people?

Ross: I know he doesn't. He has a very small

inner-circle.

Keller: Who makes up that inner-circle?

Ross: Pat Patterson and Bruce Prichard. That's his inner-circle.

Keller: Where does, say, J.J. Dillon fit in?

Ross: He's so busy on administrative things, dealing with talent, dealing with contracts, dealing with problems on the tour. J.J. is a very important part of the WWF, but he is not in the booking, TV writing inner-circle that Patterson and Prichard are. J.J. has so many other duties. J.J.'s in his office every day and he works a lot of long hours and does a great job for them. J.J. treated me great. J.J. was really nice to me when I came in and when I came out. He was nothing but a professional. He's so busy with his duties in the office. The other guys, they don't go to the office that often. They work out of their houses or Vince's house pretty much exclusively.

Keller: Patterson and Prichard?

Ross: Yes. They're the ones who if Vince decides to go a certain direction then they work to enhance that and make sure everything is going that way. They come up with ideas themselves. Patterson especially is a very, very powerful man in the WWF. He's very, very powerful. I think that he's probably Vince McMahon's closest confidant other than perhaps Linda in the entire company.

Keller: Based on his reputation going in was there anything that really surprised you about Vince?

Ross: I probably haven't been around anybody who works as hard as him. I don't know how he does it. He works every day and that's no exaggeration. I swear that is the truth. He's as dedicated to his business as anybody could possibly be.

Keller: Why do you think he is that dedicated? Because he doesn't have a lot of other interests, he fears if he relaxes the WWF will lose its position in the industry, or because he just loves it so much?

Ross: The only hobby he has that I'm aware of is working out. So the only two things he does are work out and work on wrestling. He has structured his company to where he has an immense responsibility. I think one of the basic reasons is, he gets his workout done, he trains hard, he's in great shape. I'd say he takes 90 percent of the important calls from wrestlers who are key guys, Vince takes care of them. He fields those calls. He's always on the phone, business never stops, it's a seven day a week business. He's very, very busy as an on-air talent. I just think he has a workload. The way he has the company structured, he's the focal point of the company. He probably gets as much exposure as anybody in a high profile position, including the wrestlers. He not only has a tremendous responsibility as an on-air talent, but he's also got the responsibility of managing the entire company.

His wife does a great job. She's one of the nicest people I've ever met. She's a really genuine person in my dealings with her.

Somebody else may have a different opinion, but in my dealings with her she was simply a wonderful and really loyal wife, a very astute businessperson, and Vince is really fortunate he has a wonderful family. He has two good kids, really nice kids. Shane's working in the company. He's gonna be an asset there. He's got a lovely daughter who is still in high school. He's blessed with a really nice family. They understand he's gonna work everyday. It seems they get along okay in that respect.

Keller: What are Linda's day-to-day responsibilities?

Ross: She's the president of the WWF. She's involved in the day-to-day management of the entire operation as far as Titan Towers is concerned. I don't think she gets too involved in what goes on over at TV because Vince is there so much. He's there to do voiceovers two or three days a week, probably. So Vince handles what airs on TV, but Linda works closely with everybody else, whether it be marketing or television syndication or international or the business affairs or what have you, she's right there involved in it. She is not a figure-head. She is a very intelligent, competent person who probably has not been given enough credit for the success of the company because he's so up front. He's so prominent that often times other folks who are really, really valuable there don't get their just due.

Keller: Does Vince McMahon fall short in any area in being a truly admirable leader of Titan Sports in either your view or in the view of others who have worked for him?

Ross: I don't know how he could do more. I guess philosophically there are some things he could do. Maybe he could take a little bit more time in dealing with issues, but he's so busy that he doesn't have any extra time. I'm telling ya', any of the guys who are reading this who have worked there or people who work there right now who are reading this, they know that Vince doesn't have any extra time. Vince works every day, he'll work until 7 or 8 at night at the office, he works on the weekends. I've been at his house many, many weekends working. I met with him late at night. I don't know if he's a workaholic, but I would say he certainly has those symptoms. I don't know how much more he could do. I guess he could disseminate the information within the company in a little bit more timely fashion to his production people and other people on the staff and delegate a little bit more so he could spend more time on the creative aspect of it.

Keller: In terms of the power he wields, does he wield that power because he's confident in his abilities and it's his money on the line or because he just likes having that much power?

Ross: Well, any of us who work on TV, yours truly not excluded, we've all got an ego to feed. Some people can keep their egos in check. He's got a strong ego. He's got a great deal of confidence. You've got to go back to what really makes common sense. He is financially responsible for the company. He's the guy, the buck stops with him. I don't think I or anybody

else in his position or management would probably do things much differently in terms of being as dedicated and as hard-working as he is to his company, but I think it's because he's responsible for the ultimate success or failure of it. I think he's doing what he thinks he has to do to keep the product rolling and to make it better.

If I were him I would delegate more, take more time to be with my family, I would stop and enjoy life a little bit more, and I think all that would come back to him twofold. It would give him a chance to step away and look at it. It would give him a chance to look at his product a little closer and actually listen to what was being said and see if he enjoys watching the show like a fan sitting in their living room. I don't think he's able to do that with his current schedule as it is. I don't think it's all ego. I think it's a matter of self defense, self preservation.

Keller: Do you consider Vince a very secure person or from your time around him did he seem to be constantly trying to prove himself?

Ross: I think like a lot of people who are entrepreneurial by nature, they never really reach their comfort zone. They're always looking over their shoulder and trying to get better and trying to improve what they're doing. I think that's a trait of a lot of guys. There are guys who can look at starting companies and taking it from small to big-time. I think most of the guys—I don't want to say they managed on fear, but they managed with an edge. There's this cutting edge they're always on, this delicate balance there. I don't think he's unlike any other entrepreneur by nature.

Keller: Of all the people with power in the WWF, whose level of power surprised you the most?

Ross: (pause) I would say probably Patterson.

Keller: A lot of people perceive him as the number two guy or tied with Linda with differing responsibilities?

Ross: He's number two in a specific area, the booking and the creative end. He's not number two overall. Linda is, absolutely. There's no doubt about that, but he has great influence with Vince. She does everything very well documented, very well structured, she's very organized. She is not only Vince's partner in life, she is his partner in business.

But as far as Patterson is concerned, Pat is extremely, extremely powerful in a key element we watch as TV viewers and that is formatting TV and doing the booking and dealing with the talent and writing TV. Patterson is very strong in that respect. I didn't respect how strong he was because everybody always said Vince is the boss. There's no doubt about that, but Patterson has a great deal of influence there and perhaps rightfully so. I wasn't there during their heydays, but it surprised me a little bit. I'm not saying I was disappointed. That's the area I worked in most, so I saw that more than I saw the workings of the marketing department or the syndication department.

Keller: So if the top four in the company are Vince, Linda, Pat Patterson, and Bruce

Prichard, who would be the next two or three people or does it become a blur at that point?

Ross: Basil Devito's been there a lot of years, he wields a lot of power. Prichard is just powerful in his particular area. Doug Sages, who is the financial guy. He, of course, has been in the focus a great deal in the last year or so because of their well-publicized financial situation. He's very influential there. It depends on what area you look at. In the area I worked in, it was Vince, Pat, and Bruce with their support personnel then kicking in led by Kevin Dunn, who is the executive producer.

Pat and Bruce probably spend more time with Vince than any other two people do in a company. That gives them a little edge in a lot of regards since they spend more time with the boss.

Keller: Who did you enjoy working with the most while in the WWF, both personally and professionally?

Ross: From a talent perspective I really loved working with Bobby Heenan when we were both there. We had a great deal of fun. I grew to love and respect Gorilla Monsoon, one of the nicest human beings I've ever met in any walk of life. Really a nice, nice man. There are some great production people there. Kevin Dunn was great to work with. He helped me a lot. I was an outsider when I arrived there. I came from the enemy with a southern accent. I was not well received by the masses initially.

Keller: In what ways did you sense that? Or in what ways was that obvious?

Ross: It was pretty obvious. Everybody would talk in short conversations. Nobody went out of their way to want to do stuff with you after work, but that didn't last long. When I left there I had a great relationship with everybody at the TV facility. I was always on call. I was there six days a week. The only day I wasn't at the studio was on Sunday and there were some Sundays I worked. I was in the studio every day but Sunday.

The production people really understand wrestling as it's supposed to be. That helped them do a good job either in their editing or in their audio work.

I enjoyed being around Pat. He's a funny guy and he's got a great sense of humor. I've known Bruce since he was working for Paul Boesch and I was working for Bill Watts when they were doing Houston.

Keller: Was that an adjustment for you to deal with Bruce being in the position he was in?

Ross: A little bit of an adjustment. Bruce is a very loyal guy to Vince. He's basically Pat's assistant, Pat's right-hand man. Vince will give them the direction for TV and then he and Pat will write the television. Bruce and I were neighbors, but I didn't see him as much as I thought we would because my duties required me to be at the studio virtually every day and his duties had him either at his house, Pat's house, or Vince's house virtually every day.

Keller: Where did Jerry Jarrett fit into the WWF's power structure when he worked there

over the last year?

Ross: Jerry went up there to become a member of that inner-circle of Vince McMahon, Pat Patterson, and Bruce Prichard. I don't know what the reason was for it, but it didn't seem as if Patterson and Prichard wanted Jarrett around. Then Jarrett got really busy doing other duties that took him out of the loop and all of a sudden it was back to those two guys working with Vince. I don't think anything happened between Vince and Jerry. I think if there was a personality conflict it was between Jarrett and Bruce and Pat. Then Jerry got really busy, writing and producing Mania and All-American. He was at the studio most of the time and basically out of their hair. He was underutilized as far as that's concerned in my opinion.

I didn't know Jerry very well until I went to work for the WWF. I think I had met him a couple of times back in the old Mid-South days when he and Watts did some talent exchanges. I met Jerry at that time at a couple of TV tapings. But I got to really know him in the WWF and learned he is a very intelligent guy and he was probably underutilized in the WWF as far as coming up with ideas. Anytime you have a company that runs a show every Monday night in the same arena, it forces your TV product to be produced episodically because the TV product has to reflect what happened the preceding Monday. It's just a natural fact, it's inevitable. And so Jerry Jarrett and Jerry Lawler have a very unique gift in that they understand and have mastered the art of taking a small crew with a small mix of guys and keeping their product fresh and episodic. They've survived effectively the last 20 years. They are still in business, so they've done some things right. I think the WWF television still to this day doesn't have many spontaneous things happen during the show. It is so rigidly structured and every second is so involved in either pitching something or whatever that very seldom do you get caught up in the program itself. And what do they do on the syndicated show to make you have to watch next week.

Raw is done where viewers know what is going to air next week. They do a good job of billboard and promoting next week and so-forth as a rule. I don't think their syndicated TV programs are formatted episodically at all. Jerry probably would have been able to help them there a lot more than he was able to. I think they missed the boat right there. He's a sharp guy, but for some reason he didn't mesh well with Patterson and Prichard, so all of a sudden he's back down in Tennessee.

Keller: You worked closely with Bobby Heenan. What is it that makes him tick? Did he get embroiled in the politics of the WWF while you were there or did he just show up, throw his one-liners out, and leave and go on with his life?

Ross: Bobby worked very, very hard when he was a kid to be in the wrestling business. He wanted to be in this business. He wanted to be in wrestling in the worst way. He got into it and paid his dues wholeheartedly. He wanted to be in the business. Bobby loves the wrestling business. He's got 30 years of experience. I think he was

Pat Patterson and I differed in that he liked slapstick and humor, like Dink. I like it, too, but not to the degree that he does. I think it has its place, but it shouldn't be the focus. I think it should be the garnish and not the entré.

one of the great performers of all time. He took great bumps, he was a hell of a manager for Mulligan and Lanza and various others. He is probably one of the most naturally witty people I've ever been around. He's that way in a car. He has a great sense of timing, which is a gift, God's gift. He may have developed his sense of humor, but his timing and his cleverness is just a gift he has. He's used that to his advantage. He has little formal education; Bobby didn't graduate from high school. But he's a very successful man.

Keller: What does he do outside of what we see of him on TV?

Ross: He plays golf and he has a beautiful family. He's slowed down a little bit right now. You gotta think here's a guy who was on the road for 25, 30 years day in, day out, day in, day out. Right now, I think he's really enjoying his life and his new time with his wife and his daughter. He has a beautiful home in Florida. I've been there many times. It's a pleasure always to be around him because he's so up, he's always funny. He's a student of the game. Bobby injects a lot of common sense principles to it. I really think Bobby thinks a lot like the fans do. If he sees something he doesn't understand and it doesn't quite make sense to him, then he's pretty sure the fans aren't going to understand it either. I think Bobby has a feel for what the fans are going to enjoy seeing.

Underneath that whole exterior is a very intelligent guy who enjoys the product, so I think that's what makes him special. He's learned this through perseverance since I'm sure Bobby was making five or ten dollars a night helping put the ring up, taking the ring jackets back. Then Dick the Bruiser took him under his wing and then his career started progressing from there. I can relate to that a lot. In the early '70s when I was refereeing, I travelled with a bunch of veterans all the time and you learn to just be quiet and listen and they'll teach you a hell of a lot. I think Bobby had the same philosophy. He's a lot sharper guy than those dead-pan looks you see sometimes on TV that make us smile.

Keller: Is there anybody you didn't enjoy working with while with the WWF and you don't even mind saying so publicly?

Ross: No, not really. The WWF experience by and large was positive. I liked the production people and their expertise. Not only was it a good friendship, but it helped me learn more from a

I think they could have much better lines of communication. I think people could be a lot more honest and open about their feelings. A lot of people are very paranoid of their position and they're afraid that if Vince hears any bad news or anything that is to the contrary of what is perceived to be his opinion that it will make him look bad which could certainly shorten their tenure there.

production standpoint, from time-management and organization, from continuity. I think I really improved, enhanced my knowledge of those areas by working for the WWF. That was a positive for me, so hopefully I can use that down the road someplace else. I saw how Vince thought about issues and how he came up with concepts, how he would come up with a concept and then proceeded to tell you its normal progression, the highspots and lowspots, where it would be heated up, where it would be maintained. He was very intelligent in that respect. I can't think of anybody I worked with there that I ever had words with or didn't respect to some degree. It really was a pretty positive experience overall.

I didn't always agree with Patterson's philosophy. Sometimes Bruce and I would debate a point and he would always say the company line. Even if we were going to do the company line, it was good to talk about, for the sake of conversation, another perspective and that didn't happen too often.

Keller: Philosophically, where did Pat stand differently from you?

Ross: We differed in that he liked slapstick and humor, like Dink. I like it, too, but not to the degree that he does. I think it has its place, but it shouldn't be the focus. I think it should be the garnish and not the entré. I think he changed. He was an old school guy and he changed over the years. Patterson and Stevens were probably one of the top three or four tag teams in the history of the business, most people would say that. I've seen that on tape and I would have to agree. I would be hard-pressed to name many better teams. Pat Patterson was one of the greatest workers of all-time. He's changed his style because of what he perceives. Pat has done a great job at surviving because Pat does a real

good job of knowing what Vince is thinking. When you get to know somebody as well as Pat knows Vince, you kind of do.

I'm not taking a personal affront to the fella who was Dink or when Matt Osborne was Doink or anybody else, but some of that stuff I didn't agree with. I didn't agree with the Undertaker resurrection.

Keller: Was that a Patterson idea?

Ross: It was Vince's idea that Pat probably endorsed. I felt uncomfortable watching it. That was just me. I was asked that that day and during the rehearsal I mentioned that I didn't like it. It's a very difficult place to express your true opinion of an issue. You have to be very, very careful because everybody loves to have something to take back to Vince. Everybody loves to be able to go to Vince and say, "Well, Ross didn't like that idea, Vince. He said that Undertaker thing is stupid." They embellish it. They add to it. I know my exact words, I know where I was standing and I remember who I was talking to. I said, "I'm really uncomfortable with this and I hope it doesn't offend people." Those were my comments. I didn't say it was stupid.

Keller: Do you think your opinion of that being passed to Vince McMahon had something to do with the direction he wanted to take you as a personality with the J.R. Ewing gimmick?

Ross: Oh, yeah. I think when I made my stance known how I felt about that, I think his idea for me became a focal point and something he wanted to see if he could get it done. I realized in hindsight that sometimes people in the company would ask your opinion on things only to get a rise out of you so they could go back to Vince and say, "Well, he's still pissed off about that deal, Vince."

Keller: Are you saying that an example of Vince wielding his power to show that if you don't like his ideas he can make you a living example of what you don't like? Does it go that far?

Ross: I don't know. I think he has a very unique way of measuring loyalty. There's where we have a big philosophical difference. The only negative words I've ever heard back from the WWF was the fact that some people would say things that were taken out of context and took a private conversation and it was relayed to Vince because they were, quote—endquote, so loyal to him they had to share it with him. I don't know if they did it to make me look bad and cast a shadow over my credibility or perhaps more importantly make themselves look good. That's a problem there. I think they could have much better lines of communication. I think people could be a lot more honest and open about their feelings and apprehensions and problems than they are because a lot of people are very paranoid of their position and they're afraid that if Vince hears any bad news or anything that is to the contrary of what is perceived to be his opinion that it will make him look bad which could certainly shorten their tenure there.

Keller: What is the one key difference now

between the WWF's product and WCW's if there is one major difference?

Ross: I think there are a couple of big differences. I think WCW is still a little bit more athletically oriented. You'll see longer matches, matches with a little bit more athleticism to them. The WWF, their wrestlers have to be able to function within the oftentimes short time periods that they're out there. A lot of WWF wrestlers can put in the longer matches, they're just not asked to do it as often. In the WWF, once guys get past their entrance there's two or three minutes of wrestling. They're just executing moves. They don't have time to work a hold, they don't have time to tell a story. It's a highspot match, two or three minutes of highspots.

The other primary difference is that the production facility at the WWF allows them to get things edited ahead of time. It allows them to do things late. Wrestlemania, for example. The syndicated shows that aired the weekend after Wrestlemania had Wrestlemania content in it. They waited until Monday to do their voiceovers, so when the fans got their product on the weekends, they had everything updated. The slides, the commentary, the whole nine yards. They can do that because they've got more people that are talented, they have the raw numbers and a bigger facility.

Keller: If you brought back one key thing with you that you learned in your nine or ten months with the WWF, what is that?

Ross: I think to see how a longterm plan can be enacted and how it can work for the betterment of the company when you can plan longterm. The WWF has an ideal situation because the CEO of the company is the guy establishing that. He's involved in all those decisions. Long term planning can work for you very efficiently. I also took with me a lot of production expertise, writing features, doing pre-produced features is a big part of their make-up. It's kind of like watching Short Attention Span Theater on the Comedy Channel. It fills a void there. I think a story can sometimes be told with a 90 second vignette that's narrated and tells a story better than a two or three minute enhancement match.

No matter who's calling the shots, I learned that you've got to create a situation where longterm direction is established by whomever—whomever it may be—and then everybody else has got to say, "Look, let's put our personal feelings aside, this is the direction the company wants to go in. Let's each of us work to make sure this happens." When all that comes about you have a chance then to do something successful. That's how the WWF operates. Also, the WWF doesn't seem to rush as many angles as WCW sometimes.

Keller: Back on the topic of the Lex Express tour, do you think it would have been more beneficial to invest that time and energy and creativity that was invested in Luger instead toward establishing Bret Hart as the number one star in the WWF?

Ross: I think it would have been difficult because of the make-up of their roster. Bret maybe would have been at a higher level, he

probably would have been a little bit more revered if he had gotten the exact same treatment or something similar as Lex did, but what it did was bring Lex up close to Bret's level, at least into that same ballpark. In that respect it worked. I don't know if Lex—and no disrespect meant to Lex—but Bret is very charismatic. For some reason he has an intangible that's hard to put your finger on that he's gonna be over and keep himself over with his work and his mannerisms and so forth. Very few guys can do that. Undertaker is another guy who has great presence. He has great presence and he is a phenomenally gifted athlete and a real big money player for the WWF. I just don't see anybody being the singular focus of the World Wrestling Federation. I think that the Lex Express worked in some areas better than it did in other areas. Most were looking at it as if its success rested on Luger being the heir apparent to Hulk Hogan, but there was more to that than just that issue.

You're right, maybe if Bret got what Lex got, maybe he would be at a different place than he is now. I think Bret's always going to be over. I really do. I think he's just a special athlete and he's a great talent. When the Undertaker comes back and gets rolling, they'll have two major reasons for fans to buy tickets. With as many hours of television as they have, they need to have several compelling storylines. You can't be singular in your focus with the number of hours they have. Everybody doesn't like Bret Hart, everybody doesn't like The Undertaker. Most do, but those who don't like Bret will like the Undertaker. You throw in other things and put a package together and you hope you have a marketable product.

Keller: Did you ever sense Vince absorbed what was written or said in the wrestling media about his product?

Ross: I think he's aware of what the wrestling media says about him. I've heard him react to what's been reported in a newsletter. Howard Finkle reads all of the newsletters and listens to all of the hotlines and all that. He keeps Vince informed. That's one of Howard's jobs is keeping up with what's going on. He's good at it. Howard stays right on top of the scene with all that goes on. If anything in his judgement is pertinent to Vince, I'm sure he passes it on a relatively regular basis.

Keller: Is Howard as loyal to Vince as Vince thinks he is?

Ross: Oh yeah. Howard's probably the most loyal employee in the whole company. Especially with the ribs they play on him, you'd think that would be challenged, but I never saw it. Howard is totally committed to the company. That's good. I mean, that's a good quality to have as an individual. You wonder about the obsessive nature sometimes or seemingly obsessive nature of having to know what all is going on everywhere and what all the dirt is. That's a personal choice and that's his. That's his business. Howard is a very loyal guy and I think would do anything within reason that Vince wanted him to.

Keller: And put up with anything?

Ross: Well, he does. That's proven, that's documented. He's the brunt of so many ribs and so much ridicule and persecution just because he's Howard. Howard just absorbs it and goes on and I kind of feel sorry for him sometimes with the things he has to endure. Hey, it's his choice. He doesn't have to work there. Sometimes it bothers him. Sometimes his feelings are hurt and that's when the rib goes too far. It's one thing when everybody gets a good laugh and the object of the rib can have a laugh with it as well, but when you know it bothers him and hurts his feelings, that's taking it too far.

Keller: For people who don't know the stories, what are some of those ribs?

Ross: They made him think at one time he and Harvey Wippleman were going to wrestle at Wrestlemania. They've done angles on him, they did a carry-out someplace and that was just a joke on him, they weren't going to use it anywhere. They had him go in the studio and do interviews, probably 30 or 40 interviews and everybody was in the control room laughing. The broken windshield at Raw was a surprise. He just bought the car and had to ride home in the tow-truck with the car in the back. Vince pays the tab for the rib, but sometimes you wonder if they don't take some of them just a little bit too far. But Howard has survived. He's very, very loyal. His loyalty and dedication, I would think, have been questioned. He hangs in there. You have to admire him for that.

Keller: How did the pending indictments and the whole legal situation affect the day-to-day operations of the WWF while you were there?

Ross: I think it had very little effect on the TV facility. It was a fact, it was something they had to live with. It was something that was always prevalent, always in the back of people's minds, especially when a new article would come out in the paper or something on TV. Everybody was always aware of it, but I don't really think it affected the structure and the work at the TV facility. That's where I spent most of my time. Everybody had jobs to do and everybody had a full plate. You really didn't have time to dwell on it. Yeah, we stopped for lunch sometimes and had discussions on it, about what the latest was anybody heard. Occasionally Vince would address it. By and large you didn't hear that much about it.

I think because of them wanting to keep things as normal as possible that they handled it the right way. I think they took the situation dead serious. Vince feels in his heart that he's innocent and he's gonna prove that in a court in July. He feels he has not broken any laws and that he will be vindicated with a jury of his peers. Time will tell. In regard to not upsetting the continuity of your company and to maintain some sort of an even keel, they handled it the right way because it did not really upset the day-to-day workings. Steve Planamenta may have had more to do because of his job in p.r. but for the vast majority of the company it was pretty much business as usual. That would cause me to think Vince and company did a good job keeping everybody calm and informed and to try to handle the problem without a great deal of distractions.

TORCH SIDEBAR

REFLECTIONS ON TORCH TALKS

Jim Ross: His comments about Eric Bischoff being the first WCW top executive with the ability to motivate and organize are comical in retrospect. Bischoff may have shown that tendency early, but Ross's comment that Bischoff may finally engage in long-term planning turned out to be a sporadic quality of Bischoff that more often is turned off than on. He said what he noticed early in Bischoff's reign was that he created a positive work environment. That didn't last long. He said Jim Herd had a temper, but Bischoff was more positive. That didn't last long... Ross was somewhat prophetic when he said there was room for a third promotion on the national scene with ECW's emergence in subsequent years... The most impact from the Ross interview came from his comments regarding Vince McMahon and what it was like to work for him. He said he was fired from the WWF because he wasn't seen as a team player when he wouldn't don a cowboy hat and become a character. Obviously since then Ross has become the WWF's top announcer, but he has given in and now wears a cowboy hat. He did at one point become a heel character, but now has settled in to being "Good ol' J.R." with a cowboy hat, but not an outlandish character that gets in the way of his superb play-by-play. He expressed that he didn't want to get involved in angles like Lance Russell and Gene Okerlund have. He said wrestlers are the stars of the show. His heel turn broke from that pattern, also. It shows that Ross either changed his mind or he decided to do whatever McMahon asked of him. It was probably a combination of both. The speech he gave on Raw when he turned heel was a slightly augmented version of this "Torch Talk" and was in part inspired by the reaction McMahon had to it... Ross had to watch his words because he knows there are very few places to work and he didn't want to burn a bridge, but overall, this interview with Ross to this day is the most detailed, insider account of how Vince McMahon operates on a day-to-day basis...

Sabu: His realization that he wasn't going to be a novelty act forever turned out to be true. When he first started doing the spectacular highspots, they were unlike anything ever seen before. As the years have gone by, so many wrestlers do his style of moves that he needed to grow beyond the innovative moves. His body has also begun to pay the price for years of reckless abuse. At one point he had a window of opportunity to be a huge superstar and franchise player, but now he is probably at best a valuable role player. Taz's willingness to do interviews has helped elevate his career, whereas Sabu's silence has slowed his marketability since it's difficult to get across storylines... Sabu talked about not wanting to get married and that his mother and his dog were enough for him. It turns out he did end up marrying a woman he met while on tour in Japan... He talked about WCW not liking him even though he'd prefer to work there rather than the WWF. It turns out he did have a brief stint (very brief) in WCW when Nitro launched, but he was difficult to work with since he had very strong ideas about how his career should be handled. He has become an ECW mainstay and may never step foot in one of the Big Two again...

SABU

In October 1993, Pro Wrestling Torch ran a two-part "Below the Bottom Line" feature on a still nationally unknown wrestler named Sabu who was on the verge of being in great demand. Ten months later, Sabu is truly wrestling's hottest free agent, in demand on the independent wrestling scene and with national promotions in the U.S. and Japan. In this "Torch Talk" interview conducted Aug. 9, 1994, Sabu talks about his immediate plans for the future and where he hopes to take his wrestling career over the long run.

Wade Keller: In terms of your career, are you pretty happy with the way things have gone for you in terms of bookings internationally and domestically?

Sabu: I'm happy, but I'm not satisfied.

Keller: In what ways are you happy?

Sabu: I'm happy because I don't have to take a booking if I don't want to because I have one to back it up. I can get the kind of money I want now because if they don't give it to me I can take another booking and probably get it. I don't have to take a booking if I don't feel like it. I'm taking every booking I can get, but I like the freedom of not having to. Before I felt so pressured I had to take it. Now I just feel pressure that everybody's watching me.

Keller: In what ways aren't you yet satisfied?

Sabu: I want to make more money, of course. Probably get something national.

Keller: Would you be interested in working for the WWF or WCW anytime soon if the offers were right? Or do you have some things you still want

to accomplish before going with one of the big two?

Sabu: I talked to somebody last Monday from WWF. They still want to change my name. They didn't say anything about money. They said I'd make a lot of money, but they still want to change my name so I said, "When you guys decide you don't want to change my name, I'd probably come."

Keller: Why is keeping your name so important?

Sabu: The name itself I like. I like it because now I feel it's my name. Sheik gave it to me, but I built it so I don't want to sell out yet. If I can't find work, then yes maybe I will sell out, but right now I can find work. I'm not making a million dollars a year, or even close, or even one-hundred thousand a year, but I think if I stick with it I will—on my terms.

Before, if they would have called me when I first went into FMW I probably would have done anything they wanted, but since I'm kind of building myself, kind of, now I'm more proud if I can make it with my name. Everybody wants to change it, so if I can keep it and make money at it, I'm more proud of myself.

Keller: Does the WWF want to keep your image or gimmick but change the name?

Sabu: I'm not even sure if they want to keep the gimmick.

Keller: Lightning Kid changed to 1-2-3 Kid and kept his image the same. Would you be willing to slightly change the name so they could at least trademark it but it would still be something similar to Sabu?

Sabu: Yeah, yeah. If they wanted to call me Zabu or something. Even Sabu with something at the end of it. They didn't get into it in detail. They just said they wanted to change it. They had no idea what they were... they probably do, but they didn't want to tell me. They said they didn't have any idea what it would be, but they would definitely be changing it. I told them I didn't want to come yet.

Keller: What about WCW?

Sabu: They don't ever call me.

Keller: Do you ever call them?

Sabu: No. I hear it's a bad time now because of Hogan because I guess they're not giving out any money now.

Keller: Earlier you said you were feeling pressure. In what ways are you feeling pressure and is that good or bad pressure?

Sabu: The way it was before, when I would have an average match as Sabu, people would rave and go, "Wow! That's great." Now when I'm having what I feel are good matches they've seen me enough to where they're saying they want more. So my good matches are below average now, I think.

Keller: Do you feel a pressure to satisfy the fans in various towns who are there every time to see you or are you satisfied to put on good matches for the vast majority who don't see every match and aren't that critical?

Sabu: I'm trying... I'm... I don't know what I'm

doing. I'm just trying to work harder every time, you know what I mean? I'm trying to please everybody and I can't.

Keller: Are you coming to the point where you're telling those people who always want to see you improve on the last performance that you are going to give them a good show, but not always exceed expectations and improve 10 percent every time?

Sabu: Well, I'm trying to improve 10 percent every time to please those people, but eventually I'm not going to be able to. The people who have been seeing me a lot are saying, "Well, that match wasn't as good as the last match you had" or something like that. I don't believe that. I think the last match I had with (Chris) Benoit was pretty good, but I'm sure some people probably didn't think it was.

Keller: When you talk about wanting to continue to improve 10 percent every time, does along with that improvement necessarily include doing more dangerous things or does it simply mean getting a better variety of things that aren't necessarily dangerous?

Sabu: Both. Not necessarily something more dangerous, but something original. Every time I go to ECW I try to bring in a new move. Same with Japan. Every time I make a tour of Japan, the same thing. I've still got about eight moves I haven't debuted yet because I'm trying to stay ahead of everybody else, but I don't want to get ahead of myself. If I get ahead of myself, then I'm just wrestling for myself. I'm not just wrestling for myself, I want the people to see it. I don't want them to see so much they can't remember it.

Keller: Who are some of the opponents you feel fortunate to have had the chance to wrestle or learned from wrestling them?

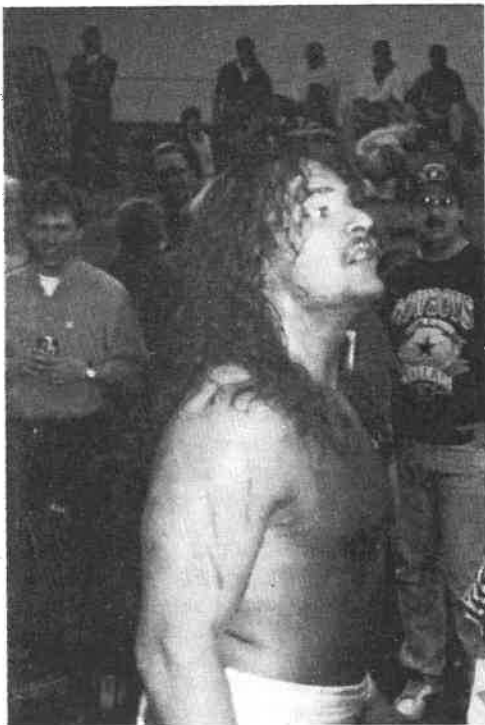
Sabu: I can't explain it. I know what you mean. I've learned something every time I wrestle somebody like Chris Benoit or Too Cold Scorpio or Terry Funk. Every time I wrestle Terry Funk I feel I've learned something. Or I'm closer to where I want to be. I've learned from every match lately, but I can't really explain what I've learned.

Keller: Do you feel fortunate you are able to wrestle as wide a variety of opponents as you have lately? A lot of wrestlers, especially in the major promotions, wrestle the same guy for two or three months and then another guy for two or three months?

Sabu: Yeah, I love it. I can't believe I get to wrestle that wide a range of guys. I'm very fortunate for that.

Keller: Are you concerned about the risks you take in the ring? To you ever feel you shouldn't have done a move after you do one or you should cool it a little bit? Do you ever regret a move that injures you or do you take it as a challenge to come back and do it again and not get injured?

Sabu: I've had both feelings. I mean, sometimes I go, "Why did I do that? I could have ended the match without doing that." Terry Funk said one time when I wrestled Lightning Kid and I tried to do a Frankensteiner and he was supposed to



Sabu

reverse it into a powerbomb and it kind of looked like it almost broke my neck, he goes, "You could have had that whole match and you could have cut that spot out and nobody would have even noticed." Sometimes I do get that feeling, that I could have done the whole match and not done certain moves that hurt me and nobody would have noticed.

Keller: Do you believe that if you go to the WWF and they invest television time in you that by definition you're going to have to tone down a little bit? They don't want their investment in you to end with you having to sit out three to six months with a broken leg. Will you have to be more routine?

Sabu: Yeah. Well, no, I'm not going to be a routine wrestler. I refuse to do that. I refuse the hiptoss, armdrag, leapfrog, dropkick style—what everybody does. I refuse to do that. But I can adjust my style so it's less dangerous, of course. But just to make them happy. I can ease in my dangerous stuff without them noticing it.

Keller: For the sake of lasting longer, would you feel a responsibility to satisfy your commitments over the long run by not necessarily going after the table every night where you might break a rib?

Sabu: Okay, this is my plan. My plan is to do this stuff as long as I can, until I get into a major promotion. I'm going to keep doing this dangerous stuff for at least another two years, then I'm gonna ease it down to where hopefully I'll be over enough to where my little things will get as big of a pop as my big things. Like, the other night when I wrestled Benoit, he kicked the sh-- out of me like a heel. When I made small comebacks, I tore the house down. Instead of having to bust the table to tear the house down, that wasn't important to the people. I still did it only because I wanted to, not because I had to.

I think in a couple of years, if I keep this up, I can slow it down and I don't think the people will notice. Right now the people who haven't seen me who have heard of me, I want them to see me and say, "Yeah, he is as good as they say." Instead of saying, "He isn't as good as I thought he was." I don't want to let them down yet. I'll let them down slowly. Not let them down, but I mean ease down my intensity.

Keller: You mean to extend your career not to rest on your laurels?

Sabu: I want to wrestle 20 more years, until I'm 50 like Terry Funk. I've always thought like that. I never went out there and thought maybe tonight would be my last match. I never think that. Even if I did break a leg, I could still work. I'd make myself work. Why not? I'm hungry still. I'm as hungry as I've been since I started.

Keller: What's your situation in Japan right now?

Sabu: I'm going back August 25th. They still like me.

Keller: Are you still satisfied working for FMW?

Sabu: I'm not 100 percent satisfied. I will never turn my back on them because they made me

money when no one else would. They've given me the opportunity to do anything I want in that ring. Most people say you can't do this, you can't do that. When they saw me the first time they said do whatever I wanted. I did and they loved it. I plan to be with them the rest of my career if possible.

Keller: Do you sometimes feel left out not being able to be in one of the major two promotions in Japan and wrestling some of the guys you'd like to on a regular basis?

Sabu: Yeah, I feel that, but then that's just selfish on my part. They gave me a break, so I'm going to give them a break until they don't want me any more. I've been offered a lot of money to go to New Japan. The money sounds really great, but the double-cross doesn't sound real good. The way I could go is if I double-cross. They're (FMW) not going to let me go. If I go, it would be a double-cross.

Keller: FMW is not going to look at you leaving like Jim Cornette looks at Brian Lee joining the WWF, as a natural progression and an opportunity for you?

Sabu: It would be totally different. It would be like me going to the competition.

Keller: Who are some of the guys in Japan you'd most like to wrestle?

Sabu: Mike Awesome, Goto, Onita, Dr. Luther, and Judge Dread since he's there now.

Keller: How about some of the guys outside of FMW you'd like to wrestle?

Sabu: (Jushin) Liger, Samurai. I'd like to wrestle Benoit in Japan. I think we'd get a better reaction in Japan. Ultimate Dragon, I'd like to wrestle him. I'd like to wrestle Stan Hansen. He'd probably kick the sh-- out of me, but I'd like to wrestle him (laughs).

Keller: Are you satisfied with your role and your placement in ECW in the last few months? Are you happy with your progression and the progression of the company?

Sabu: Yeah, I don't mind it. I guess it's okay.

Keller: You don't sound entirely enthusiastic.

Sabu: Well, because they put me back with Shane again and they keep trying to put me in tag matches. I'm not letting them. I don't want to be a tag wrestler. Because with my gimmick, especially the way they bring me out on the gurney and all that, how can I stand on the apron and wait for a tag? But then they want me to break character, they say, "The fans are smart here." They say we're wrestling for the hardcores, the "smart-marks," or whatever they call them. Why let the people know they're smart? I still say treat it like they don't know. I'm not really excited about the way they're using me, but they're treating me good otherwise, I guess.

Keller: Are you satisfied with the way your character is portrayed now, tweening with the fans cheering you even though you haven't changed your style?

Sabu: I like it. It's not like I'm kissing up to them and trying to get them to cheer me. It's just

happening that way. I like it, but if they didn't cheer me, I'd like it just as much. I'm just glad they like my wrestling.

Keller: Do you feel a similar loyalty to ECW as you do to FMW?

Sabu: No. My loyalty to ECW comes up in December. If they can't give me more matches per month or more money—I'm not trying to pressure them, but I'm not getting any younger and neither is my mother. I want to take care of my mother better. So the only way I can do that is to make more money. If they can't give me more dates and more money by December, then I think I might go somewhere in January.

I talked to Onita and I told him I want to take a year absence from Japan and I will never return for another company. If I'm gone for five years, I wouldn't return for another company until I come back to FMW. I want to take a whole year off because I think when I come back I could make a bigger impact in Japan. Plus, I want to take a year off to build my name in the States.

Keller: If you had to speculate right now, is there a pretty good chance in January you will be in the WWF?

Sabu: I think so. I'm not real positive. I think by then. My plan right now until January is to build my name as strong as I can independently so when they do make me an offer again, they will think it would be stupid to change my name. Like Rick Rude, they wouldn't change his name because he's already built a name. Hulk Hogan, no one's gonna change that. Maybe if I can build it strong enough, it won't be an issue. There are exceptions to their rules and I'm going to try to be one.

Keller: If you were to join the WWF, are you concerned about losing control over your character where you might be placed in a position of having to do things for your character you didn't want to do?

Sabu: Yeah. I don't like that. I think—(laugh) I don't know if I should tell you this—but I think I could ease into doing anything I wanted. I'll do what they want in the beginning, but I can ease in my own style, the dangerous stuff, without them noticing right away. I think.

Keller: What about a speaking role?

Sabu: I can't do that. That would be totally out of the question.

Keller: So you would need to be with a manager in the WWF or WCW?

Sabu: Yes.

Keller: Would that bother you if you were with someone who was a lower-level manager who couldn't do interviews all that well, to represent you?

Sabu: It wouldn't bother me in the beginning because I think, actually I would prefer it because my wrestling would shine better than the manager. I think in the long run I would want probably the best I could get. I think Paul E. (Dangerously) is one of the best. I know (Jim) Cornette's the best, but I think Paul E. is up there, too.

Keller: Given Cornette's affiliation with the

WWF, is he someone you'd like to be managed by if you joined the WWF?

Sabu: yes, or, if Paul E. wanted to go, I'd go with him. If Paul E. wanted to go today, I'd go.

Keller: Do you think that's something Paul E. might want to do six months from now?

Sabu: Yeah. Maybe not. I'm just saying if he said to leave now, I'd would leave now.

Keller: You work closely with Paul E. Do you think sometimes he thinks it would be better to be Paul E. the manager and leave the booking and promoting behind?

Sabu: I think he would like to do that. Right now he's doing what I'm doing. He's got something with ECW and he wants to build it. He wants credit for it. He wants to take something from nothing and make it something. The same with me. But if all else fails, let's go to the WWF. Actually, I'd rather go to WCW except they don't like me.

Keller: What makes you say that?

Sabu: I've heard before that everybody always says I don't get over and wouldn't get over in Atlanta. They're already negative on me. At least the WWF is wanting to do something with me. WCW is just saying I'm out. They're acting like I'm a robot and can't adjust my style. If anything, I'm human. I am.

Keller: Are you confident in some other ways that ECW may take off by December and offer you enough dates?

Sabu: Yeah, I think something good will happen with them. I hope. If something happens, I'll stick with them. I may change my mind. I want to make something succeed because of me. The WWF is already successful and ECW isn't yet money-wise (on that level), so if I could help that, I would probably stick with them. If they're not really doing anything but spending money, I don't know if I want to stick around.

Keller: What are the main things you're looking to get out of your wrestling career? Is it recognition on a national scale? Is it recognition on an international scale? Is it purely money even if there isn't a lot of recognition? Is it respect? What do you want to look back on in 20 years and say you accomplished?

Sabu: The respect and recognition internationally. I'm human and I do need money, but the money isn't the number one thing. It's kind of sounding that way now only because I'm 30 years old now and I still haven't made that much money. Like I said, my body will break. I can't do it forever. I want something to happen in 1995.

Keller: When you say you want respect internationally, do you want the type of respect Hulk Hogan has from just people on the street saying, "I know you, I'm a fan of yours?" That's more adulation than respect. Are you looking for certain types of respect from certain people?

Sabu: I would rather have respect than just being recognized on the street.

Keller: You talked about injuries earlier. If you were to get injured on an ECW show, would you

feel it was your responsibility or would you think that the promotion would owe you something if you got hurt on one of their shows?

Sabu: Nobody would owe me anything if I got hurt. They don't say, "Go out there and break a table." They'll ask, "Are you?" And I'll say, "I'm not sure yet. I'll know after the match." Nobody makes me do anything. Now and then somebody will ask, "Can you do this?" And I'll say, "Yeah." And I'm kind of flattered because they want to see it. Paul E. never makes me do anything or says if you don't do something, you're not working or anything like that. It's all my choice. And if I get hurt, that's my problem. That's why I say if I get hurt, I can still work. I can work because I'm stubborn.

Keller: How about Mexico?

Sabu: I started to look into that, but now I don't want to. I want to build my name around here. The only time I want to leave the country is for Japan.

Keller: Do you think it would help your exposure in the States to work a AAA show in Los Angeles?

Sabu: I wouldn't mind that. This is my home, so I'd like to drive to my towns instead of flying all the time. Anywhere in the States I would work for anybody.

Keller: What about SMW or the USWA? Would you do some spots for them or work full-time?

Sabu: I've talked to both (Jerry) Lawler and (Jim) Cornette. They don't want me to do a spot, they want me to go full time and I can't. When I'm home in the States, I want to be as close to my mom as possible. So working on the weekends is great because I'm home five days a week with my mom, but when I'm in Japan, that's different. I can't be with her, but that's something I have to do. Everything else I don't have to do.

Keller: By the way, you are going to be really popular with all of the mothers who read this interview?

Sabu: (laughs) It's the truth, though.

Keller: You've entered another realm. You've begun promoting in your area in Michigan. What got you interested in promoting?

Sabu: What got me interested was watching these other Mickey Mouse guys book these angles and storylines with guys who aren't capable of handling them. So the last three shows we did there were no angles, no storylines. The only angle is whoever I'm wrestling. The rest of the guys, I'm treating them like young boys like in Japan. They go out and wrestle and they leave the ring. There's no chairs, no tables, no blood. They're not capable of doing anything else.

What they will do, if you let them go, is imitate what they see on TV in the ring without practicing. I don't like that. I don't believe in it. That's what everybody around here does. They go, "Have you seen Randy Savage do this? Well, you go do it." That's not right. That's imitating, just like little kids. I don't want to be a part of it. I'm tired of being a part of a Mickey Mouse thing. Maybe it's low budget and all that, but it's not an imitation.

Keller: And you think you're doing it well or right?

Sabu: I'm not real sure if it's well or right, it's just since I have the say—so, it's done my way. I may change in a little while, but right now I just want the people to see me work as hard as I can and see the other guys work as hard as they can without looking like we're imitating or faking—pretending we're something we're not. They say because they've been wrestling two years they're going to break tables. It was seven years before I broke a table. And I didn't do it because I saw someone else do it. I thought of something different and I decided to do it. That's what I'm trying to encourage with everybody else, to be original. If everybody copies everybody it just kills the original.

Keller: On the promoting end of things, besides running the event itself, how has it been scheduling dates with buildings, calling wrestlers, advertising? Have you been surprised by that end of the promoting?

Sabu: I have another guy do that, Pee Wee Moore. All I really do is have a say—so about my match and the final say about the other matches. He does everything, gives them their finish. He does everything. I won't let him go real crazy with the storylines and stuff like that. We don't have TV, we don't have many fans, and we don't have any big name wrestlers. It's only me and whoever I wrestle and that's not even a big name. We don't want the people to think that I think or we think we're the WWF because we're far from it.

Keller: Are you part of an important element of the pro wrestling industry, the element that develops wrestlers who eventually make the big promotions successful?

Sabu: I'd like to think that.

Keller: A lot of people don't understand why you break tables. Some even criticize you for it, saying it's "stupid" or it doesn't make sense. You've heard it all. In your words, explain what it means to you and what you hope it means to people who see your matches.

Sabu: Okay, when I originally did it, I got beat a bunch of times in one city in Japan, like six or seven times. So Sheik said, after I got pinned, "Go back to the ring and do a backflip." I said, "How about if I moonsault a table?" He said, "What's that." I said, "I'll show ya'." Boom, I did it because I wasn't happy with myself. I felt that I wanted the people to see I wanted to do better, but didn't. I'm trying to show the people my heart, that I'll risk breaking a leg if they come watch me. You know what I mean? Something like that. I'm just trying to show them that my heart is stronger than my body.

Keller: Is part of it showing to the ECW fans how reckless or crazy or insane your character was, too, or is it just to show your heart?

Sabu: The heart. I can be reckless and crazy doing other stuff. But the table thing is the heart thing at the end. During the match is when I'm reckless. At the end I'm just trying to show them—I don't know exactly, I can't really explain it—but I'm punishing myself because I know I can do better.

Keller: What is your opinion on the state of the wrestling industry right now compared to five, ten, fifteen years ago when you began looking at this as a career?

Sabu: I don't like the way it looks because there's not going to be many jobs for many guys. I think I'm gonna do okay only because I know what kind of drive I have and what kind of heart I have. I can't see anybody else's drive or heart, so I can't tell if they're going to make a mark in the business or a dent. I think I'm gonna only because I know what I have inside and I haven't put it all out yet. If I were on a national level, I could do more and make it make sense more. Since I'm not, I'm just trying to give the people the best I can each night. I don't know if the business is going to survive very strongly or make money for a lot of people. I think I'll do okay because I know what I have inside.

Keller: How much longer do you think your uncle (the original Sheik) will stay active in the ring?

Sabu: I don't know. I know on our last trip to Japan he kept saying I'm not going to do this no more, I'm gonna let you take it over. I don't know exactly what he meant by that. I hope he quits before he dies in there, but I don't think he will. He still now is saying he can't wait to get back to Japan and get back in shape. I don't know how he can do it. He can hardly walk.

Keller: What does he do other than wrestle in the ring?

Sabu: He likes kids. He hangs out with his grandkids. He paints for them. He wants to get back into promoting, too.

Keller: What do you do besides the stuff that is related to wrestling such as promoting, wrestling, booking your dates, working out?

Sabu: Nothing.

Keller: Do you ever think that you should be doing other things or trying to not be so focused on one thing? Or is this your time to be focused on just your career?

Sabu: I never think about anything else. When I do it's only momentarily. I can't sleep at night until I dream about highspots. That's where I get most of my highspots is when I sleep at night. I wake up and right them down.

Keller: Do you hope to get married and have a family or would your career be enough to look back on when you're 50?

Sabu: I'll have a family, but right now I can't afford one (laughs). I want to make it in wrestling. That's my family. My mother, my dog, and wrestling. That's about it.

Keller: Do you want to get married some day? Or if it happens, it happens, if it doesn't it doesn't?

Sabu: If it happens, it happens. I don't think I want to. If I meet the right person and it happens, I wouldn't have much of a choice. I'm not looking, no. Like I've said, my mom's in the front seat, my wrestling's right next to it, and there's nothing in the back seat.

TOO COLD SCORPIO

Too Cold Scorpio, real name Charles Skaggs, has been dubbed one of the future superstars in the wrestling industry by many insiders. His flying moves impressed enough readers to put him in first place in the 1993 "Best Aerial Wrestler" category in the Torch Yearbook. In this "Torch Talk" interview with Scorpio conducted on Aug. 22, 1994 he discusses how he got started in wrestling and where he wants to go from here. He also speaks out openly about what he thinks of Ric Flair, The Gangstas, Brian Pillman, Bill Watts, Eric Bischoff, Sabu, Dusty Rhodes, and more. He also talks about failing WCW's drug tests and being fired as a result.

Wade Keller: What has the extent of your involvement been in wrestling since leaving WCW?

Too Cold Scorpio: The last couple of months I've been going over to Japan with New Japan. I've also been wrestling in ECW and doing shots for the IWC and AAA.

Keller: Relative to your days in WCW, is it a busier schedule or do you have more free time?

Scorpio: As far as keeping busy, I'm probably more busy now than I was in my WCW days because they (WCW) aren't doing as many house shows as they had in the past and they're doing more with TV.

Keller: Do you enjoy being an independent contractor in that you get to work a wider variety of styles?

Scorpio: Yeah, I do. I prefer that. I have more opportunities in getting a title belt, too, as well as working with different people out there who have the ability and talent to keep up.

Keller: How did you originally discover professional wrestling? Did you discover it on TV?

Scorpio: I've been a fan pretty much all my life coming up. A friend of mine, Magic Michael Starr out of Denver, Colorado was a professional wrestler who weighed about, I would say, a buck eight-five soaking wet with a brick in his pocket. He was a really good friend of mine and he talked me into going down and watching them practice. I went down a couple of times and saw it and asked if they got paid, got up in the ring and tried it, and I've been doing it ever since. So the actual guy who got me into it was Jeff Gold known as Michael Star.

Keller: Was being a wrestler something you had aspired to become?

Scorpio: Actually I always wanted to become a professional football player. Basically I wanted to do anything that had the pro behind it—pro football, pro boxing, or pro wrestling. I always had a feeling I would be in some kind of a pro sport.

Keller: How much did you play football as a youth?

Scorpio: I played throughout school and then turned around and ended up getting my wife at the time pregnant and I went from there to wrestling. I pretty much blew a full ride scholarship to Oklahoma, which I kind of kick myself in the tail for now.

Keller: When you started wrestling, what were your first impressions? Did you immediately fall in love with it?

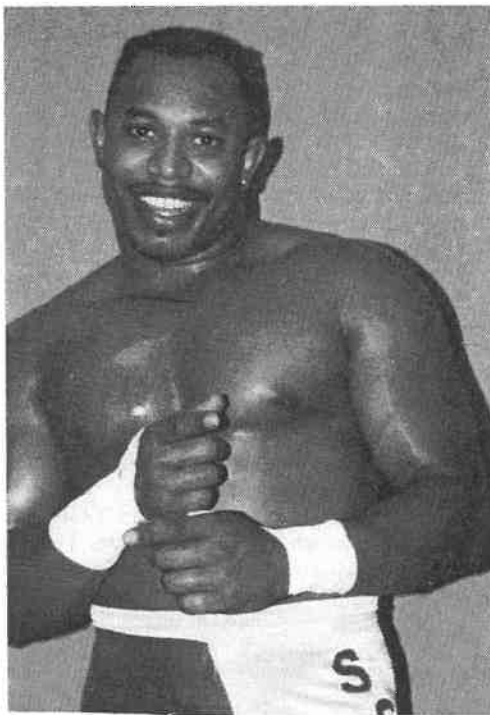
Scorpio: It was something I fell in love with. I didn't have a teacher as far as going to a wrestling school and learning how to wrestle. I mean, the most training I ever got was when I went to Japan. I've always been able to do the acrobatic type flips and maneuvers since I was younger. When I got in the ring it kind of just stuck with me, it just came out. I've been doing it ever since, just perfecting it a little more as the years went on.

Keller: When it comes to having the sense of where you are in the ring and how to move about the ring, did that come more naturally to you than others?

Scorpio: I think it probably did because most people go to school to learn that and need that and it takes them a while before they get the ring sense. I may have picked it up a lot quicker than most, but then again you have a lot of wrestlers who just have a natural talent to be wrestlers.

Keller: Was it Vader who originally helped push your career beyond the independents?

Scorpio: Yes, I was doing a couple of independent shows and Vader was the headliner on one of the shows. He happened to be in town from Germany or Japan, just happened to be in town so they had him on the card, and he saw my style of wrestling and said I would be real good over in Japan. We talked about it for a couple of



Too Cold Scorpio

Bill Watts was an ass, but Bill Watts was straight. I mean, when I first went down there, he came right out and said he was an ass and Bill Watts was the type of guy, I mean, if he's gonna call you a n— he's gonna call you a n— in your face and not behind your back like a lot of them do up there at WCW.

years off and on and then he finally paid a guy to come down and tape the match. I took the tape to Japan and a few months later they were calling me about touring over there.

Keller: What had you heard about Japan wrestling before Vader talked to you about it?

Scorpio: I was aware that it was big because I was friends with Vader and I was watching his tapes of the style of wrestling they had over there and I could hardly believe there were that many people out there who were doing that style of wrestling. Then it was a lot more physical than it was here in the States. When I first saw it, I didn't know if I was intimidated by it or more or less curious and interested in learning more about it.

Keller: Do you remember any wrestlers in particular who maybe influenced your style via video tape at the beginning of your career?

Scorpio: On the tapes I was watching it was basically Jushin "Thunder" Liger and Pegasus Kid, Suzuki, Hase, and a lot of those guys along with some of the big guys like Vader. He told me basically I would very seldom wrestle that style, and that instead I would be better off watching the juniors and picking up that style because that would probably be the category I would be in. I'm about 5-11, 230 to 235. When I first went to Japan on my first tour in 1990-'91 I was about 200 pounds.

Keller: You started in about 1987?

Scorpio: Yeah, '86 or '87.

Keller: Put a timetable on some of the breaks you received in wrestling.

Scorpio: I would say from the time Vader first spotted me to when I went to Japan, I spent probably three years or so doing independents. Nothing big, just local shows in the west. Then I went to Japan and then it was another year before I went to WCW because after Japan I wrestled in Mexico.

Keller: In your earliest days in the ring, how

often did you wrestle and for how much money?

Scorpio: At that point, I wanted to be a wrestler, but at 20 dollars a night starting out and driving all over the countryside and putting up the ring, it was a little hard. The pay went up, but then again sometimes you wouldn't get paid more than 20, 50 or 75 dollars a night. Also, there were so many independent wrestlers out there who were out to mess with you, it was real hard.

Keller: When you were travelling to those shows and obviously meeting some of these wrestlers who were working independently who were maybe the same age and in the same position as you were—or maybe some of them were a lot older and had already been through a lot—what was your feeling about the wrestlers' mentality at that point? You were kind of entering a new world; did you get a good impression?

Scorpio: Me, I've always had a good impression, but then again I always ran into a lot of guys who had been through a lot. I learned a lot from Col. DeBeers, Playboy Buddy Rose, Jumpin' Jim Brunzell, B. Brian Blair, a lot of guys I grew up watching I ended up working independent shows with. I would always ask and they would give me different advice. I would take it in.

As for their mentality as far as wrestling goes, they still had a pretty good set way of it being a sport at that given point in time instead of people trying to turn it into an entertainment. Then, with all the politics that went on, it kind of takes the fun out of wrestling for me.

Keller: What kind of politics? The politics you encountered later on?

Scorpio: Yes.

Keller: Did you find any of the veteran wrestlers you ran into earlier in your career were unwilling to help you and wanted you to stay away from them because you were seen as a threat or you were just a dime a dozen because they ran across so many young, aspiring wrestlers?

Scorpio: No. Most of the guys I ran into knew I had a natural talent, but then again, a lot of guys I ran into were from the old school and they thought a lot of high-flying and flipping and that type of stuff shouldn't have been in the opening three matches or so. In the olden days they used to go out there and wrestle and barely used the ropes. To a lot of them, it was a different style and they tried to calm me down, but then again Col. DeBeers and Superfly Snuka and a few of the older guys used to say, "Hey, you go out there and do what you have to do and do your thing, it ain't your fault they can't follow you." I've always stuck with that motto and went ahead with it.

Keller: You still follow that philosophy?

Scorpio: Oh yeah. If it's the opening match or the main event, either way you have to give 110 percent. If people paid their money you have to give them what they came to see.

Keller: How did you get hooked up with Mexico?

Scorpio: My deal in Mexico got going was when I was over in Japan. Vader was talking about Mexico the whole time and the guy known as Black Cat, a Japanese wrestler over in Japan, hooked me up in Mexico.

Keller: What had you heard about Mexico?

Scorpio: I had heard quite a bit about the water and the style of wrestling being real hard. Then again, it's the same style of wrestling they do over in Japan except it was three falls and working with guys you never worked with before. You are always curious about what they're gonna throw at you.

Keller: Did you find Mexicans still worked from a different side of the body?

Scorpio: I had always heard that, that they worked a lot on the right side, but when I got down there it wasn't even half that bad. I mean, you had three or four of maybe the old timer guys every now and then who would work the other side, but most everyone was working the American style when I went down there.

Keller: How did the lifestyle as a wrestler in Japan and in the United States differ?

Scorpio: I found that in Mexico it's not so much a thing as far as face and body as it is in the States. In the States, it's like you've got to have a good body and a good face and you've gotta have a gimmick to get over, where in Mexico everything is a gimmick but the (bodytype) is not a big deal because you've got guys at 4-11, fat, and overshaped who look like they can't do nothing but then they're turning backflips and somersaults over your head. Most guys that size don't move like that. It was really different in Mexico, the way they carried themselves. The economy is kind of low in Mexico but everybody over there is still treated like a star and everybody has the utmost respect for everybody, which is real good.

Keller: How were the accommodations travelling from show to show?

Scorpio: As far as travelling it was different in the States. In the States you have to provide your own car, you're own transportation. In Mexico they provide a ride for you or you have to ride on the bus. When you had to go on the bus, it was a little rough, it was difficult. When they took you to the shows, it wasn't as prompt in Mexico as it is here. If a show starts here at 7 o'clock, it starts around that time whereas a show in Mexico (scheduled for 7) might start at 9, 9:30, 10. You can imagine what time you would get back then after driving three and a half hours to a town, but you always had a driver to take you to and from the shows, which made it not as bad.

Keller: How long did you wrestle in Mexico?

Scorpio: About four months straight then I went back off and on for about a year.

Keller: Did the time you spent in Mexico help polish your in-ring skills more than any other experience at that point in your career?

Scorpio: I think the most polish I ever got was

when I went to Japan. I learned how to bump correctly and everything was more solid. When I went to Mexico, it was more a sharpening up of my skills as far as flips. I always had a natural ability, but nobody down there could really teach me anything I really didn't know or something I wanted to use because everybody's got such different styles of wrestling.

Keller: Describe the process you went through training in Japan?

Scorpio: The process for me was I went over there and I was basically the only American in the dojo of about six or seven boys, all Japanese boys, none of them spoke English—or very little if any. The teachers were (Hiro) Hase and (Kensuke) Sasaki. These guys were real hard teachers as well as Inoki coming in. But the training course would start at 9 o'clock in the morning. You'd get up at 8:30 and take a few vitamins and have a banana or two, stretch, do weights for an hour, do 500 to 1000 squats, 300 to 500 pushups, jump rope, do an hour's worth of weight training, then get in the ring and bump and shoot wrestle for about an hour. Then you'd do amateur style wrestling and regular wrestling. It was a three hour or four hour daily training course that was so hard the first couple of months because all you did was train, eat, and sleep. I was too tired to do anything else for the first three or four months. It was more or less like going to boot camp, although they were not as strict with your leisure time. Being American and not really reading Japanese, it was kind of hard to get around at the beginning. My first two weeks there were fairly easy in that respect because Chris Benoit was on the tour and just happened to be there at the dojo and as one of the students who made it through the dojo, he was trying to help me along. He told me some of the things I needed to do which I had never done before.

I was 210 and I thought I was pretty big. I went over there and was one of the smaller guys in the dojo. I was really surprised and shocked by that. Then getting stretched for the first couple of months when I thought I was a badass, it teaches you right quick.

Keller: How did the attitude of Japanese wrestlers compare to the American wrestlers?

Scorpio: Oooh. The attitude and the respect for the sport is so strong over there it's unbelievable. I think a lot of the guys here should go over and take a course in Japan and train over there and then they would respect the sport a lot more than they do now. There are so many people today that had stuff handed to them where they never really had to put in dues as far as putting up the ring and taking it down and driving from town to town and making 20 dollars a night and working their way up.

Keller: Did you ever sense wrestlers in Japan took pro wrestling too seriously?

Scorpio: I lot of times I did as far as the way some of the training course went, but then again, that's the Japanese style and pretty much in all the Japanese sports and all that they do they are dedicated like that. That's their culture, so you

more or less go with the flow. You don't go over there and change the culture when you're an American or a foreigner over there.

Keller: Before you had hooked up with WCW, were you content wrestling independently in the States, Mexico, and Japan? Or were you completely focused on joining one of the two big U.S. promotions?

Scorpio: I've always wanted to be down in WCW more so than in the WWF because I thought more wrestling was down there, but then again if Vince let his wrestlers do what they can instead of saying it's entertainment, let the guys kind of go at one another more, I think it would bring the quality of wrestling back up a lot.

Keller: Did you think the chance to enter WCW might not come?

Scorpio: I was doing independents and thought to myself one day I would be doing this as a career to make money and I didn't want to be a common man doing the nine-to-five regular job anymore. I wanted to make a living for my family off of wrestling. I was hoping to be doing it here in the States as opposed to be going overseas, but I've always wanted to go to Japan and still do. I trained there and I've learned more there than anywhere. I'm dedicated to them. My first loyalties are with New Japan, so if I can get a bigger Japan contract, I have to go where the money is because I'm also a businessman.

Keller: How did you get hooked up with WCW?

Scorpio: Vader actually hooked me up with World Championship Wrestling. He hooked me up in Japan and said he could hook me up in WCW, but to be patient. I sent him a tape and he took it in to Bill Watts. It sat around for a while, then Vader went in and started talking about me. They asked where I was then watched the tape and liked what they saw, so they gave me a call for a tryout. I came down, tried out, and they liked me, so they hooked me up with Ron Simmons.

Keller: What was your first impression of management in WCW when you were negotiating compared to Japan and Mexico?

Scorpio: I would say they were rushing for me to sign the paper and they weren't really paying for my talent at the get-go. They wanted me to just sign and not have me take the time out to have a sports advisor or lawyer look over everything. I still think I got messed around when I signed on.

Keller: In what way in retrospect do you think you weren't treated fairly at the beginning?

Scorpio: I thought they were rushing me into things really fast. Just me saying I wanted to be in WCW—which I kick myself in the tail for—didn't help negotiations. I can't blame anybody else for that.

Keller: Did you get treated like a professional athlete or did you get treated like somebody applying for a job at a fast food

restaurant?

Scorpio: I was taken on as a wrestler. They came professionally to me. They didn't treat it like a 9 to 5 job as far as waiting in line. It seemed they knew I had a talent and stuff. At that point in time Bill Watts was in the office and he must have seen an opportunity to make money.

Keller: What was your impression of Bill Watts at the time?

Scorpio: Bill Watts was an ass, but Bill Watts was straight. I mean, when I first went down there, he came right out and said he was an ass and Bill Watts was the type of guy, I mean, if he's gonna call you a n—— he's gonna call you a n—— in your face and not behind your back like a lot of them do up there. I mean, Bill Watts may be prejudice, he may be whatever you want to call him, a redneck, whatever, but then again he knew how to make money when it came down to it.

When he made Ron Simmons the WCW World Heavyweight Champion, he had an idea at least in his mind what he thought would make money. When he brought me in he had an opportunity to push me up the ladder, but I think he was pushing me up the ladder too soon too fast when a lot of the old-timers were still in the office who were still stuck with the old mentality of wrestling.

Keller: Who were some of the people in the front office who had a different philosophy than you?

Scorpio: Ric Flair. He wasn't really in the office at the time. Dusty Rhodes. Ole Anderson was floating around. There were words about who was going to take over. A lot of the guys were from the old school. Even Ole Anderson was from the old school, but he was straight, too, and stuff, but none of them really wanted to use a black man because they always thought that like in the old days a black man should be on in the first couple of matches—get him in and get him out and be through with him or having a black guy fight against a black guy, but that stuff is old.

Keller: Did that surprise you? Growing up in Denver, you knew that type of attitude was out there, but when you got to WCW, was that the first time in wrestling you had really experienced skin color being a factor?

Scorpio: When I came down here to WCW in the South with the southern mentality they have down here, it really shocked me. I really didn't know it. After I was released from WCW, people called me up at 3, 4, 5 o'clock in the morning and told me things. Half the stuff I had always heard, like stories about Dusty Rhodes and several other people being prejudice, but I never would have believed it without several people calling me and telling me this and that. Ric Flair, he comes to your face and shakes your hand and plays the games, then behind your back he and others really can't stand you. I mean, for them to play the role like they do, you would never really suspect that.

Keller: Was Ric Flair one of the people you

felt acted as if he supported you to your face but behind the scenes worked against you?

Scorpio: Yeah. I didn't think about that until actually after I had left and stuff because of other things I had heard. Again, it's only speculation and I can't say if he really did or not. I mean I've heard of several stories where he was in a territory working and a couple of wrestlers he let go of color because of little things they've done of no matter, really.

Keller: Did you feel during your stay in WCW you were held to a higher standard than others or treated more strictly than non-blacks?

Scorpio: The only time it came down to that is when they started doing the testing and it was only the black people who were getting tested. A lot of the guys were on roids and a few other things and they were finding out the tests were coming from leaks from the office. I didn't think that was right because they always knew when the test was coming, or whatever the case might be. I never hid anything from them—never had a reason to—because I figured what I did on my time was my thing as long as I didn't come to the ring (impaired) and I performed as I was supposed to.

Keller: In the end, though, that's what cost you your job with WCW, right?

Scorpio: Yes, it was.

Keller: What was the drug testing process when you were there? How often did it occur and was everyone tested the same way and equally as often as far as you know?

Scorpio: They came up with a policy that if they speculated (somebody needed to be tested) they could test you and then if your tests came back positive, they had the right to test you as many times as they wanted. The third time it comes back positive you are released. In the process of all that, the second test came back positive (for marijuana) and they told me I had to take a class. I went ahead and took care of it. When it came time to take the third test, they didn't want us to take it at a certain clinic—they had their own doctors all of a sudden. To me, to have your own doctors all of a sudden when it comes down to the third test, that seemed a little strange. I mean, it had been a couple of years and they never had their own doctor and now all of a sudden with everything going on in New York, they had their own doctor.

Keller: What was suspicious in your eyes about doing that?

Scorpio: I think to me when they had their own doctors, it might have been a good way to thin out the crowd you wanted to thin out. When you have your doctor versus a public doctor there is a lot of stuff you can do behind the scenes and say tests came out positive or negative when they really didn't.

Keller: Did the front office stress to their wrestlers in word and action not to use any drugs at all or only not to use certain drugs?

Scorpio: Basically they said not to use any drugs at all, but I guess they got a whiff that a lot

of the guys were cutting up and stuff and taking cocaine and steroids and stuff like that. One thing led to another and they tested for all drugs. At one point in time you had a certain level as far as marijuana went and if you had any over-the-counter drugs they had to know what you were taking and how much, plus have a doctor's prescription for it, which is understandable. But if you're going to test for something, you've got to know what the results reflect. If a guy were to smoke pot and quit, it would still be in his system 30 days later. They finally made a level at 100 or so, but they say mine came back at 150-plus, which I doubt. I just left it alone, though, and let things be.

Keller: All three of your positives were for marijuana?

Scorpio: Yes.

Keller: How common was recreational drug use during your stay in WCW from what you personally observed?

Scorpio: There was a lot of marijuana floating around from the CNN tower all the way down to the TV crew, as well as with the boys and some of the top office guys. I mean, even some of the guys who are in the front office, the road agents, a lot of those guys sat out in back with ya' and did stuff, too. It goes back to the old saying, which I kick myself in the tail for not realizing at the time, that when you're with a lot of the guys who are in the organization strictly to snitch, then that's what they do for a living. They sit there, get you high, get you drunk, then say you did it with them. Yet, you're the one who gets fired while they're still there. Yet some of the people they hired were released from other organizations for being on drugs and are still on them, yet they take them back when every day at TV they were still messed up. And some of those people who are still doing drugs and getting high before every TV, they're still there but they aren't of color, they aren't black.

Keller: What was your impression of Eric Bischoff compared to Bill Watts?

Scorpio: I thought Eric Bischoff was going to be real straight, kind of get things turned around. I have no problems with Eric. Eric was real good. My only problem with Eric was I thought he was listening too much to, say, Ric Flair or others in the office instead of taking over and doing things he felt were right himself. He still is in the driver's seat, although he has a couple of guys underneath him doing the booking and he has road agents, but when it comes down to it, he still has the say-so. If you know where the money's at and have the opportunity to make the money, then why not go ahead. So I've always felt people like Ric Flair and Dusty Rhodes, who have always been some of the top bulls—ers in the business ever since they've been in the business, know how to bulls— somebody who has never been in the business.

Keller: Besides that, did you think Bischoff came across as more organized or more fair with wrestlers? What were the main differences between Watts and Bischoff?

Scorpio: Eric compared to Bill, Bill Watts was

more voice. He was a real loud, outspoken type of person, whereas with Bischoff he's more of a calm type of person. In a calm situation where you can talk to a person instead of yelling at the top of your voice it's a little bit different as far as dealing with a boss. To me, Eric could have been a little more tough, but then the way he handled things I thought was good. He showed his face, he came down and shook hands. He did a lot of things with the wrestlers, as little of a thing as just patting a guy on the back and saying it was a good job. As far as when Ole Anderson was in there, he wouldn't do that. There were no pats on the back or thank you's. You'd be amazed at what doing that would do for a lot of guys. Even when someone did something wrong, it would be better if instead you said, "You were good overall but did that wrong. If you did this it would be better." That's better than jumping down a guy's ass. Bischoff is more calm. I don't know if he voices his opinion about what's a good match and what's a bad match or not now. I know with Hulk Hogan in there, if Eric's going to listen to anybody, he'd listen to Hulk with Hulk having been around so long and having made so much money in wrestling. With Hulk, Eric could turn the company around, make money, and save his job.

Keller: Did it bother you to work for Bill Watts when you had heard or realized first hand that he had some prejudices?

Scorpio: To me, I really didn't have a problem. If you were man enough to say something to my face and listen to me respond, that's fine. He also had this thing about fining people about not making shows and showing up late for shows, which I thought was a real pain in the ass, but then again at the same time it made sense because you had a lot more, say, top name guys who were headlining cards who made the show compared to missing the show and paying that thousand dollar fine or whatever fine it would be. Watts would fine you for anything, so when somebody's doing that, it makes you do stuff right.

Keller: Overall when you look at the way the wrestling business operates in this country and even worldwide do you think it's as color blind as it should be or do you think somebody's race enters the picture much more often than it should?

Scorpio: I think there's a lot of times race enters the picture a lot more often than it should. The simple policy is to follow the old style of wrestling. A lot of the guys in power now have always been down here and are related to one another and that's why a lot of them are still around in the same organization. I mean, you see a lot of guys go from one place to another place and they're taking all their buddies and all their friends with them and half of them are related. To me, that's a shame that it's all a family type of business. They need to let a lot of that stuff go. When you're in a 65–75 percent black area trying to run a wrestling organization such as in Atlanta, like WCW's doing right out of CNN Center in downtown Atlanta, then you need to have black wrestlers who appeal to a lot of black fans. The Mexicans and other minorities don't

have anyone to appeal to them as well. A lot of the guys they have on top have been on top for so long.

Ric Flair has been 12 times world champion. How many more times can you win the belt? It don't mean nothin'. Make the young guys that you've got up and coming with the talent the same kind of stars that you were at one time. When they first started they weren't anybody until somebody made them a star.

Keller: Do you think in a sense, in wrestling, the generation that finds success tends to not want to hand the torch down to the next generation until they are too old?

Scorpio: Exactly. I mean, instead of forever holding onto the belt, let somebody else hold on to the belt and give them a chance to become the man you once were. The only way you're going to do that is to pump him up or build him up. If they spent half the time and money on young guys that they do on Flair, who is basically a has-been and over-the-hill compared to somebody like Sting or Johnny B. Badd, who is an up and coming wrestler, or myself, they'd be better off. You could spend the TV time making a drawing card out of younger guys instead of killing them off.

Keller: Is there something about Ric Flair that should be an exception to that rule because more so than Sting and others when they had the chance on top, Flair has proven to be the type of guy who goes out there with a high level of energy in the ring every time? Is he an exception to the rule because he has worked so hard for so many years?

Scorpio: Then again, I don't know, but it's basically a routine. He's done that routine basically his whole life, a routine that is so easy to do you can do it without breaking a sweat because you become so used to it. I could understand if he was somebody like Terry Funk. Terry Funk at 50 years old is turning moonsaults off the top rope and still doin' somethin' new compared to the same old stuff he did 25, 30 years ago, like being sent into the corner and going up and over the top and down the apron and up. You're gonna see that. You're gonna see the slam off the top, the big suplex, you know what I'm saying. How many times can you take that face bump? You can only take that so many times. When you look at it, to me that's not really working hard. When you get in there and do something new, that's working hard. This is the '90s and when you're trying to keep up with the '90s, that's work.

What Flair and they fail to realize is that in their time they were great wrestlers and, yeah, they deserved the belt. People paid their money to see Ric Flair. Whooo! People wanted to see that. But now this is the '90s and that whooo! gets a little weak. It's the same old stuff. Once upon a time Flair could chop you and cut you. He could chop you now and be lucky to kill the fly on your chest. I mean, you've gotta let that go.

Keller: One more question back on the issue of race. Do you think given that pro wrestling is a sports theater of sorts that it's

okay to use somebody's heritage or their race or their skin color as an aspect of their push or their gimmick? It isn't the same in wrestling as it is in baseball or basketball where they try to eliminate race from being a factor in their marketing. Do you think it's okay to play the race card under certain circumstances?

Scorpio: Actually, no I don't. I think it's something that should be based on natural talent and what somebody can do in the ring because there are so many white guys, Mexicans, black guys who can do the same thing that anybody else out there can who have natural talent. People would be amazed what kind of a crowd they appeal to. You see what I'm saying, you get some Mexican wrestlers in there that appeal to everybody, just as you have with blacks and whites. Look at Sting. I know black people, white people, Mexicans, Japanese people all around the world who love him because he appeals to everybody. It's something he just has. It's like a lot of black wrestlers. Ron Simmons when he was champion there were a lot of people who were behind him. Black, white, and Japanese. It was about time.

Keller: Are you familiar with the Gangstas who are in Smoky Mountain Wrestling now?

Scorpio: I've heard about them. To me I think the stuff they're doing is leading toward that racist stuff and it's too much. It's that role that you've always been put in, that stereotype of how a black man is supposed to act. No, I don't like that. I think a man should be himself. If they were legit and they were for real and that's the way they were 24-7, that would be understandable, but a person like Mustafa, somebody who holds a regular job—he's a Muslim—he might have a little racist in him and stuff, but then again that ain't the way he acts all the time, so why do that.

Keller: Do you know New Jack?

Scorpio: I've heard of him, but I'm not really sure if I know him. If I saw his face I would probably know who he was a lot better.

Keller: If New Jack really liked being, quote—end quote, "being black" and believed it when he congratulated O.J because there were now "two less (Whites) to worry about" or believed it when he said he disliked Martin Luther King because he was a passivist, is it then okay to be himself as his gimmick and draw money by antagonizing people who don't understand black cultures?

Scorpio: No it's not. It gets down to getting somebody in there who appeals to everybody and who gives the people their money's worth. Now if you want to start a racial war and talk about those things, there's already been enough fighting and killing going on without somebody trying to start a riot. Me, myself, you go down in one of the redneck towns in Tennessee or be in the wrong place at the wrong time, you're gonna run into hell talking s— like that. And that's whether you're black or white wherever you go.

Keller: If your goal is to raise hell and draw heel heat and hopefully draw money off of it, is that wrong because it is playing the race

I think there's all kinds of ways to draw heat where you don't have to use racial ways to do it. You can do it in just a strict, old fashioned, down and dirty street fight compared to somebody just wanting to wrestle. There's all kinds of ways to get heat. To me, what's being done with the Gangstas is cheap heat. Anybody can get cheap heat, but can you get real heat? That's talent.

card or is it right because it's business?

Scorpio: I think there's all kinds of ways to draw heat where you don't have to use racial ways to do it. You can do it in just a strict, old fashioned, down and dirty street fight compared to somebody just wanting to wrestle. There's all kinds of ways to get heat. To me, what's being done with the Gangstas is cheap heat. Anybody can get cheap heat, but can you get real heat? That's talent.

Keller: You don't necessarily respect someone who would resort to what you call cheap heat?

Scorpio: As far as their style in wrestling, no I don't respect them. As far as them being a person themselves, I can respect them still. As far as their style of wrestling, no.

Keller: Talk about your experiences with Dusty Rhodes?

Scorpio: Dusty Rhodes was great in his time, too. The way he always talked, the way he's always acted. Basically Dusty Rhodes was your white black man in professional wrestling. After I heard the tape and the comment he made, it kind of pissed me off.

Keller: What was that?

Scorpio: He said something like, "Look, baby, I can talk just like the black man so there's no reason to hire them because I can be your white n-----." I heard that comment and that was on tape. I myself was wondering what was up with that. Just hearing that, it was one of the calls I got late at night that somebody had planned for me revealing different things from the past, including clippings from way back.

Keller: What was the nature of the tape where he said that?

Scorpio: He was talking to one of the office guys in the promotions down there in Texas, I'm

Marcus was a real good kid, but he never had to work at anything. He just happened to be at the right place at the right time and got contracts. He just happened to be doing it just right. By himself he doesn't seem to have any ring savvy or ring expression. He's just kind of blah.

not sure what (the circumstances were).

Keller: It was a private conversation that had been recorded?

Scorpio: Yes it was. Like I say, that was way back whenever. But even to hear that, all this time I thought Dusty Rhodes was cool, that he maybe hung out with a few black folks, that he had been around them, that he wasn't scared of them. Then when I got up there and came to believe he was prejudice, I was like, wow. A lot of the things I hear now just kind of shock me. I thought he was cool.

Keller: Did you find him a likable person in your dealings with him?

Scorpio: I've always felt Dusty was cool. I've always liked him. But, to me, the way I grew up and just from being around, I can tell you already that he's a con man and he knows how to talk and that talking gets him almost anything because that's what got him over. Knowing how to talk got him over because it certainly wasn't his wrestling. It was his talking that made everybody pay to see him. Vice-versa his son is the type of person who can get over with his wrestling as well as with his talking.

Keller: What did you think of Dustin?

Scorpio: I think Dustin is a real good kid. I liked Dustin. He works hard. When he first came down, he always had that thing, too, because his daddy was in the office, he was getting pushed, he was getting this, he was getting that. But then again, he proved himself, too, and worked his way from the bottom all the way up before just getting something handed to him. Although it wasn't long before he was in the driver's seat. He's still up there where the belts are, a place that I felt I should have been, but then again Dustin himself is a real good kid. He's young, he's got a good head, and he works out hard.

Keller: Did you find that Dustin was pretty down to earth despite his dad being the boss?

Scorpio: Yeah, I did. Regardless of a lot of the stuff that happened, but no matter how you

look at it, he's still the boss's son. You always have to look at that, but I thought he was real down to earth.

Keller: You talked about Dustin getting some of the spotlight that you felt should have been shined on you. Another wrestler who has probably felt that way over the years is Brian Pillman, who a lot of people compare in size and style to you. What are your thoughts on him?

Scorpio: To me, 'Flyin' Brian has a rude attitude. I don't know if it's just him or if he's just fed up with the organization or what, but like I said when Flyin' Brian came up four or five years ago, he was "Flyin' Brian" and I thought he was going to do a whole lot of flying, but he has not done a whole lot of flying compared to the Japanese or Mexican style of wrestling. If people really want to see a lot of flying action, then they need to get Japan tapes. Flyin' Brian flies, but he really doesn't fly compared to a lot of the wrestlers in other organizations. In general, I really don't care for Flyin' Brian because of his attitude and stuff.

Keller: So you didn't get along with him?

Scorpio: No. I pretty much get along with just about anybody. We were on a basically, "Hi, hey, how ya' doin'?" terms.

Keller: Was that perhaps because he saw you as a threat because his gimmick was being the high flier and you came in and had the same youth and the looks and the bodytype that might compete with him for his position?

Scorpio: Yeah, I think a lot of guys were intimidated by not only my style of wrestling, but by the simple fact that I can get in the ring and wrestle with anybody no matter what size they are. To me that holds a big threat to a lot of people who then worry about me taking their spot and putting them out of a job. They might wonder about being signed again because they already have a high flyer. I mean, yeah, that ran through my mind a lot.

Keller: What are your thoughts on your former tag partner, Marcus Bagwell?

Scorpio: Marcus was a real good kid, but he never had to work at anything. He just happened to be at the right place at the right time and got contracts. He just happened to be doing it just right. Together we make a great tag team, but by himself he doesn't seem to have any ring savvy or ring expression. He's just kind of blah when he's there by himself. Even now with him being teamed with The Patriot, they're tag team is okay, but Stars & Stripes is something they've done in the past. It's real rough to get people to do the same old gimmick and getting people behind it, like Cowboys and the Russians. To me, The Patriot would have been a great wrestler preferably by himself over sticking him with Marcus. Marcus in a tag team with the right person, he'll do good, but Marcus by himself, no.

Keller: As a tag team wrestler and teaming so regularly with Marcus, did you tend to

spend more time with him outside of the ring?

Scorpio: Oh, nooo. No, no. Me and Marcus never really hung out. The only time me and Marcus ever really hung out was when we were on the road, if I had to ride with him or he had to ride with me or at the gym. Other than that, he usually rode with Erik Watts or Sting. But we never rode together, we just wrestled together. As far as working out our tag team stuff, the only thing we ever did was in the ring, talking about it before, and going out and just doing it. We never really practiced or anything. I was really surprised that in the ring the teamwork worked so good when outside the ring, that's Marcus and this is me, no big deal. At the time they teamed us up I never knew we were going to be a tag team. Just one day we were tagging and we tagged ever since then.

Keller: Were you happy with that team? Did you think you guys complemented each other well in the ring and could have done a lot?

Scorpio: Yeah, I thought we could have done a lot with it. Then again, there were certain things that Marcus did and certain things that I probably did that probably held us back from getting the belts or holding them like we should have. Then again, with Dusty Rhodes in the driver's seat at that point in time, he might not have wanted us to have the belts.

Keller: What do you think you had done to prevent you from getting a higher position?

Scorpio: Just basically voicing my opinions, saying that I thought I should be getting more money or the same amount as Marcus. I asked to be paid for my talents, what I was worth. Other than that, I didn't ask for a lot or raise hell. I always did pretty much anything they asked for. Then again, some of the things that Marcus did weren't championship quality as far as holding the belts, as far as attitude, and as far as the way he acted.

Keller: You mentioned he got paid more than you did. About how much more did he get paid than you?

Scorpio: Like I said, it's really hard to say, but I know when I first came down there he was making close to 75 or 100 thousand dollars more than I was. Then after a while I got a raise and they were asking him to take a pay cut and he wouldn't take the cut. I don't know what was up, but he was still making more than me at that point in time. As far as Sting and those guys, they are good and make a lot of money, but then again how many do you have out there doing high risk things that I'm doing. I was just asking to be paid what I was worth and they weren't paying me anywhere close to that.

Keller: Do you mind saying what you were paid while working for WCW?

Scorpio: I would say about anywhere between 110 and 120, something like that. You turn around and pay taxes and everything like that, you aren't making more than 75, 80 thousand a year which ain't s— considering all the risks I was taking.

Keller: Does it bother you that the wrestling

industry doesn't have organized pension or insurance?

Scorpio: Yeah, that is something that bothers me because, like I said, I do do a lot of high risk moves. A lot of times if you get hurt there are certain things that they would do. They would let you go see their doctor and pay for it, but if you have a real big injury, that is up to you. I took the time to try to invest in a little life insurance—I took a life policy out on myself as well. You've got to have insurance. If you get hurt, you don't know if they're really gonna take care of you or if you're going to be well off. The way the wrestling business goes, you can be here today and all of a sudden you could be gone tomorrow, no matter how much you spent or what you got saved.

Keller: Was the lack of insurance and the lack of unity something WCW wrestlers discussed with each other or did they keep that to themselves?

Scorpio: A lot of times that flowed around quite a bit and you'd talk about what policy you're on, a Lloyds of London policy or whatever and who's your lawyer or sports adviser. As far as a lot of talking and stuff floating around the locker room, there was quite a bit of that.

Keller: Is the idea of some kind of a union a possibility some day or would the wrestling scene in the states have to be somewhat different for that to work?

Scorpio: Right now it's really hard to say because there's so many different people who are trying to run wrestling. It's really hard to say the union would ever come together. And if it did, there's a question of how many wrestlers would join. There are so many wrestlers nowadays who just get into wrestling and don't even know how to wrestle but then turn around and accept 50 or 60 dollars a night just to be on TV and they're happy. There's a lot that you'd have to look out for.

Keller: In a sense, a union is even more needed because there are so many wrestlers who are willing to drive the deserved price down because there is a greater supply of wrestlers than there is demand.

Scorpio: Yeah. Plus, you have so many guys these days who are into the Japanese and Mexican style of wrestling that a lot of young guys are starting to do a lot of flips. If you do something today, you'd be amazed how many people would be out there doing it tomorrow. Does anybody really have anything original? It's like back when the DDT and the clothesline were finishing maneuvers, where now those are highspots.

Keller: There must be a special place in your heart for Vader after all he's done for your career. What's your impression of him as a wrestler and as a professional?

Scorpio: Vader to me has always been Vader. He's the type of person who if he likes you, he'll do anything for you and if he don't like you, you should stand clear because if you get up in his face talking stuff he'll set you straight. As a

professional, I think he's real good, he's a hell of an athlete. I mean, I can't see why he's not having a run with Hulk Hogan or a run with Ric Flair and why he doesn't have the belt because at 450 pounds, there's not many guys who can do the stuff he can do like moonsaults and backflips over the top rope. You find a lot of guys who can do that, but not at that weight.

Keller: Is there some legitimacy to the complaints that he is too stiff in the ring or that he doesn't care about the welfare of the wrestler opposite him in the ring in order to make himself look better?

Scorpio: No, because to me that's wrestling. That's what they have to do to bring the people back. If you've got a big man in there, 450 pounds, hitting like he's 110 pounds like a little girl, who wants to pay the money to go see him? You're big, you're bad? Show me. If you're out there working with a nobody or a no name, you shouldn't be out there a long period of time. If a guy doesn't want to be taking that kind of punishment, then he shouldn't be in wrestling. He should dish it out to him or take the 1-2-3 and go home. A lot of guys are out there and are paid to get eaten. Don't complain about the butt-whippin' you're about to take. The people out there paid their money and that's what they want to see. To me, about him being stiff, I prefer it to come like that than to not hit me at all.

Keller: What do you know about Hulk Hogan?

Scorpio: I don't know him. He was in and out basically before I left and I never really got a chance to talk to him and meet him. Hogan is a great wrestler with a great mind for the business; he knows how to make money. But to me, when Hulk Hogan was up there in New York, that was Hulk Hogan. I think down here in the South there are a lot of people who want to see him because he is Hulk Hogan, but after they see him I don't know if they're going to pop off him anymore because of the simple fact that he's been around for a while. But if they're going to pop off anyone, they would pop off Hulk Hogan more than they would Ric Flair because he probably can still do it better than Flair. Hulk Hogan has always been able to talk and that's a key thing.

Keller: Are interviews an aspect of your job you spend a lot of time thinking about or learning about?

Scorpio: Interviews are something I've never done until I went to WCW. Now that I was down there, it's something I'm working on now because you never know when you have to do an interview or cut a promo. Given the way the TV's goin', that's something I'm working on.

Keller: Do you find there are elements of the psychology of an interview that are similar to the psychology of working a match?

Scorpio: Yes, there are. As far as psychology, getting your point across without yelling. There are a lot of things you do while at the same time being yourself or being Too Cold out there. A lot of times I get out there and I'm not Too Cold,

I'm just Scorpio. That ain't what the people want to see. They want to see Too Cold on the screen and on the interview. So that's something you've got to work for just like when Hulk Hogan steps to the ring or he does his interview, that's Hulk Hogan. People don't want to see Terry (laughs).

Keller: What is the background of the name, Too Cold Scorpio?

Scorpio: The background comes from basically a lot of the moves that I do are just "too cold." It's like the Dis that Don't Miss because if you miss it, you sure will be dis'd.

Keller: What about Scorpio?

Scorpio: Scorpio is basically my sign. I'm a scorpio and that name basically came from high school. I started it and it just kind of has stuck with me ever since. The Too Cold comes from people saying I was "too cold" when I first came out.

Keller: What was your impression of Sid Vicious? You were around WCW when he was around.

Scorpio: Sid is a big, impressive guy who could have had anything he wanted. He could have been the next Hulk Hogan. To me, I just don't think Sid was ready at that given point in time to give a full commitment to doing that and letting go of a lot of his, say, luxury type things he was doing while off. Sid, being a big guy, I don't know if he was on roids or not or if (he is gone) because of the test or what, but just what I know from Sid, he was a good guy. I really don't know him well. I haven't been around him a whole lot. From the way he treated me and talked to me, he's always been an okay guy.

Keller: You were in England when the incident happened with Arn?

Scorpio: Yes, I was the one who broke that up.

Keller: Describe what happened there as you saw it?

Scorpio: Basically I heard a lot of bumping and thumping, a lot of yelling and talking like, "I'm gonna kick your ass," "I'm gonna get you." I went down to the bottom of the steps and Sid and Arn were down there fighting and there was blood all over the corridor. When I came down the stairs, Sid was holding Arn down, booting him in the face and punching him in the back and stabbing him with the scissors. Arn was standing up on his feet losing a lot of blood. He was holding his own. I stepped between them, pushed them apart, and Sid came back like he was going for Arn and I pushed him again and he just went out the door and went around to the front. I don't know if he was coming around to get Arn again or whatever, but Leon ("Vader" White) just happened to be in the front of the lobby talking to the people up there asking about his phone trying to make an international call and Sid came around through the front bleeding and stuff and Vader saw him and grabbed him. I was with Arn and took him to his room. Ric and everybody came down and basically that was that.

Keller: Did you end up finding out more about how things reached that serious point?

Scorpio: Yeah, it went back and forth, back and forth. Basically how it all started was we had a long plane ride, it was like a 14 hour ride from here to Germany, then we had like a 7 hour bus ride to go and do a match. Then we had another 7 hour ride to the hotel. So we were basically on a two day thing going with hardly any sleep. I mean, everybody had a few beers on the bus and everybody was having a good time on the bus. The next thing you know, egos started jumping and people started talking stuff. A lot of guys got out the wooden spoons stirring up s— amongst the boys. When you have a few beers in you and you're tired and stressed out a long ways from home, it doesn't take much.

Keller: Was it actually Sid who went to Arn's hotel room doorway?

Scorpio: Actually, it took place outside of Arn's door from his door to Sid's door all up and down the corridor to the steps, but it started up in the bar. It started with them talking up there. I can remember Sid saying something about Ric Flair, Arn Anderson trying to defend Flair, then sitting there and talking and getting in each other's face, Doug Dillenger broke things up, everybody sat back down, Sid said something else, Arn Anderson threw a glass full of beer at Sid—glass and all—Sid moved out of the way, and they were about ready to go at it again right there but Doug Dillenger made Sid go to his room. Arn was there and Arn went back to his room and then the next thing you know that's when everything broke out. Supposedly a chair was broken outside of Arn's door; the chair came from Sid's room. But Arn also had a pair of scissors that he also stabbed Sid with first in the stomach. It was like he opened up the door, clocked him with the chair, the chair broke—and he hit more of the door frame because I don't think he really hit him, just split his nose a little bit. Next thing you know, Arn said he didn't know if he grabbed the scissors first, but Arn had the scissors because Sid didn't have the scissors down there. If you ask me, he came up with them off the ground and stabbed Sid in the stomach and fell back into the hallway. From there, they fought and stuff. Sid hit him with the chair, he dropped the scissors, picked up the scissors, started using them, and they went back and forth all the way down the hallway.

Keller: Even though it isn't as constant in WCW as it is in the WWF, did you sense that life on the road created tension?

Scorpio: For a while there WCW was doing 15, 18 days straight on the road. That was real hard with guys getting stretched out and things like that. The majority of the time with everybody taking their own cars and going to different towns, everyone was doing pretty good. On the trips in the United States, as opposed to the tours of Europe, there isn't a designated hotel where everybody stays, so everybody's really spread out. While I was with WCW, it was real low-key. Everybody maybe met at one point. But not often was there a real problem where everybody was ready to fight each other. There were maybe one or two incidents in the whole thing that stressed people

out.

Keller: What was a typical week like for you working for WCW?

Scorpio: For me, my family was still in Denver and I was living in Atlanta out of a hotel. I basically would get up and go to the gym, lift every now and then, and then hang out until showtime, drive to the show, and drive back. I've done most of the shows traveling by myself. I would ride to some shows with Ron Simmons every now and then. When he went bad (turned heel), I couldn't be seen with him or riding with him because fans would be watching the cars as they drove up to the arena. Other than that, I saw my family maybe once a month when they'd fly me home. Then they cut back to barely doing that. It was really hard on me and my family in general. As far as Leon and some of the other guys who had big contracts, it was really easy for them to get back and forth to see their families.

Keller: Did your family give you support even though you were away so much?

Scorpio: Yeah, my family supported me for the longest time. I had a lot of support from my wife. But as the year went on, it was harder on my wife with me being gone from home for such a long period of time.

Keller: And you have five kids?

Scorpio: Six.

Keller: And counting?

Scorpio: No, it stops there (laughs). The oldest is 9 years old down to 2 years old. I have four boys and two girls.

Keller: What is it like for them being sons and daughters of a professional wrestler? Does that change their life at all, make them feel famous or special?

Scorpio: It kind of does in a way because when their dad is on TV or seen quite a bit on tapes and magazines, a lot of the kids know who their daddy is. Some of the kids want to be their friends now so we're trying to get them to understand that we want the kids to be their friends for good reasons, not because their dad is a professional wrestler. To them, they really enjoy it a lot.

Keller: Especially for your older kids, is it tough for them to adapt to you being away so often?

Scorpio: At one point in time they couldn't understand why I was gone all the time. They preferred me to be home more. Now that they're getting a little bit older they understand that I have to go to make the money, but they still wish I was at home.

Keller: Do you think it would be better if WCW or U.S. promotions in general designated weight divisions more where there would be a light-heavyweight division and a heavyweight division like in Japan?

Scorpio: I think if they had a junior division like WCW had going for a while, that would be good. It would be good to have your own junior

weight and heavyweight champions. WCW had that and then took it away and I think it's real hard because a lot of the guys they have aren't really big enough to be fighting a guy like Vader or Sting. It could be good or it could be bad—it just depends on how they did it.

Keller: Talk about the difference in style from Mexico to Japan to the United States. Is the difference in style somewhat overrated in terms of wrestlers' adaptability or does it take a special kind of wrestler to be able to move from one style to another?

Scorpio: No, wrestling is pretty much the same everywhere you go. Wrestling moves are basically the same, it's just that the style is different. The Japan style is a lot more physical and has a lot more to do with submission holds or shoot holds, which a lot of people don't do or don't know how to do. Then again, if you're just amateur wrestling, there are a lot more capable wrestlers in the States than they have in shoot wrestling, which is a totally different style. If in Mexico you don't know how to use the ropes or flip and fly and plancha and splash to the floor, you might as well not even bother going down there because everybody down there is doing that. You've got to know how to keep up and understand that they're doing two out of three falls, you've got two referees, you've got a rudo and tecnico—basically a good guy and a bad guy—referee in the ring at the same time. You could be a babyface with your back on the mat and the heel referee will come over and count 1-2-3 real fast and you'll be out and the match will be over if you're the captain. You've got one who counts fast, one who counts regular, one who breaks the rules, one who doesn't. It plays a big part in there because you have to fight around four guys as a good guy because a lot of the matches are six-man tag matches. It's a totally different style.

But to jump from Japanese to Mexican and to American styles really takes a certain ability to adapt or having certain wrestlers who can keep up with those styles. That's basically the problem, finding out what your opponent is doing and just doing what they can do and, preferably, having them also trying to do what you can do.

Keller: Are there certain elements of what goes on in wrestling in Mexico and Japan that promoters in this country could adapt to and benefit from?

Scorpio: I think in Japan there's a lot of the style that could be brought to Mexico and the United States that would help a whole lot because they sell out quite a bit over in Japan, more so than they do over here. Even down there with the AAA group in Mexico, they sell out quite a bit, but I guess it's a matter of how you run your business and advertising. Vince has a real good idea. He knows how to draw money. WCW needs to take some notes, still. With Hulk Hogan up there talking to Eric (Bischoff) and putting him on the right track, hopefully he will be able to get things going right.

Keller: Why do you aspire more to work for

WCW than the WWF?

Scorpio: It's just that I've always wanted to be in WCW. I thought I could be a WCW star. But then again I like the WWF, but to me it's more entertainment than wrestling. For a while it was starting to be like the soaps with a lot of gimmick characters. Then again, Vince now is starting to bring a lot of wrestlers in who can wrestle who are young and up and coming. He doesn't have as many old guys.

Keller: Not that you'd want to get a job just because you're black, but when you look at the WWF and WCW and see the lack of black role models on wrestling shows in this country in either of the two major promotions, do you think that in the right situation you could be a major attraction and bring together a lot of fans?

Scorpio: Yes, like I said, Vince knows how to make money and has a real good opportunity. If I went up to Vince and he had a gimmick and a place for me, I know that he could make money. He would probably do the right thing as far as making me the star that I should have been which I think would draw money. I don't have a problem with going up and working with him. Right now I just kind of want to get out and circulate a little bit before I go right back onto the road constantly.

Keller: Given the circumstances under which you left WCW, is there a certain time period before you can return or would want to return?

Scorpio: When I left WCW my contract was null and void. I had no problems with returning the next day if that was possible or to any other organization. I was told I should probably wait six to twelve months before pursuing WCW again. The reason I didn't just jump and get right in touch with Vince is the simple fact that I didn't have his number at that point and I was just kind of circulating, waiting to see how everything was going to happen, how things were going to go with Vince and everything he had coming down on him (legally). I feel now that everything is done, that there are probably a lot of people who probably did Vince wrong and said this and said that, and that Vince is probably out to put a lot of people under and just start taking down territories and bringing in wrestlers again.

Keller: Have you been in contact with SMW or the USWA concerning making appearances?

Scorpio: I talked a few times with them and they were bringing in WWF guys for a certain price. The price I asked wasn't a whole lot which was half of what I was making up in WCW. It was like they couldn't pay that so I couldn't do that.

Keller: They couldn't make it worth your while to go down there?

Scorpio: At that time, yes. Other than that it was never really discussed. Also, I had heard rumors that somebody had said I was asking for a thousand dollars plus or something down there in Smoky Mountain, so I never did call them

back or say otherwise.

Keller: You never actually spoke money with SMW?

Scorpio: They had asked me a price and I had told them something and they said they would be in touch with me. It was less than a thousand dollars.

Keller: What is the experience like working in ECW arena with 1,000 rabid, temporarily insane fans? Is that a different experience?

Scorpio: It is. It's a totally different experience, but then again that gives you that chance and that opportunity to bring back that old style of wrestling. You get to go out and you get to fight and you get to do your stuff. I've been working with Sabu, so I've been working pretty much Japanese style matches which has been real good.

Keller: What do you think of Sabu?

Scorpio: Sabu reminds me of the Sheik with wings. I mean, he's kind of crazed. He'll catch you off guard and draw blood on you and everything else, too. He can fly and flip. He's got a lot of good moves. I like working with him because he's real physical and every time we go in there we know we're gonna fight. The thing is he loves to fight and I love to fight, so when you have two fighters who are also high fliers, you're going to have a hell of a show. Outside the ring I watch him and he seems real quiet. He keeps to himself a whole lot, which is also kind of scary. You often wonder about those quiet people (laughs).

Keller: How has it been working with Tod Gordon and Paul Heyman?

Scorpio: It's been real good. My biggest thing is I have six kids and a family to feed. You make sure my money's right and you pay me right and I'll give you a show. I have no problem with working with anybody who likes to pay. Like I said, if the people pay to see Too Cold, I'm gonna give them a show. I don't care, like I said, if 10 people or 20 people pay and they show up, I'm gonna have to go out and give them a 110 percent because I got paid.

Working for ECW involves a lot more freedom. I'm able to go out there and do my style of wrestling. It's like in Japan they have certain rules you have to abide by, but then again they let you go out and fight, which is good. Bill Watts always liked a good fight, but he also liked to be in charge and have things done his way. I got bitched out for doing one minute matches and f—ing up in it. I know Watts was hard on people, but that's just Watts. Eric seems a lot more low key. If you've got the first five or six guys out there throwing chairs and slamming everything, what are the big guys gonna do in the main events? All they do is brawl, so Eric (Bischoff) and Dusty (Rhodes) got mad about it when I'd do too much in my matches.

Keller: What's your outlook on the state of the wrestling world in this country and worldwide? Do you think it's healthy and growing or do you think there are a lot of problems and there needs to be a weeding out

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of some of those in management positions?

Scorpio: I think everything is going good. There is a lot of old blood that needs to be weeded out and thinned out and a new generation of talent that needs to be brought up. The fans need to see some new wrestlers unless you have old wrestlers who can still work and do something different. When I saw Terry Funk brawl outside like he used to then climb to the top rope and do a moonsault, I was impressed.

Keller: Have you worked with Terry in a match?

Scorpio: I have not yet had the opportunity to work with Terry. I would love to work with him. It has been a pleasure being on a card with him and seeing him. I grew up watching him. I would love to step into the ring one time with him.

Keller: What are your long-term aspirations? Do you hope to be in the wrestling ring at age 50 or do you have a certain timetable you've set for yourself?

Scorpio: At age 50, I hope to be out of the sport if the money's right. I hope to have an organization or a restaurant and be sitting well with the kids and watching them doing what they choose to do.

Keller: Do you want to make this your career or do you have other irons in the fire?

Scorpio: Right now I want to make this my career but I would like to start a business when I can, have a little something to fall back on when wrestling ain't there. The way wrestling goes and all the highspots that I do, you never know when something's gonna happen.

EDDIE SHARKEY

Eddie Sharkey grew up following wrestling and liked it so much he became a wrestler. He then began to train wrestlers. And he finally took the next step and became the most prominent independent promoter in Minnesota. In this Torch Talk, conducted Sept. 21, 1989, Sharkey talks about his start in wrestling and the path he travelled to become a promoter and trainer today.

Wade Keller: When and how did you originally get involved in pro wrestling?

Sharkey: Well, Wally Karbo and Verne Gagne started me. That was back in the early '60s and there were so many great wrestlers around. There were people like Malenko, Hard Boiled Haggerty, Karl Gotch, and the list goes on and on and on. I've always been a wrestling fan. About 1961 I started wrestling professionally. However, I wrestled on the carnival for a few years before that.

Keller: What was wrestling in a carnival like?

Sharkey: Well, we took on all comers in the carnival. There would be one of us on the inside and one on the outside. Sometimes there'd be some real shoots, too.

Keller: What promotions did you work for?

Sharkey: Oh, there were so many of them. There was Roy Shires in San Francisco, Calgary Stampede, Los Angeles... They didn't have names like NWA and WWF, ya' know. I've worked in Phoenix and Salt Lake City. I held several championships in the area, like Inner Mountain Championship, Western States Tag Champion.



Eddie Sharkey

Keller: What promoter did you enjoy working for the most?

Sharkey: The most? Verne Gagne and Wally Karbo. But that was back in the old days. Things were different. Things weren't like they are now, you have to understand. I'm talking about years ago. Roy Shires, I liked. Gus Caras might have been my favorite back in St. Joe, Missouri.

Keller: Who was your least favorite to work for?

Sharkey: Verne Gagne, later. No doubt about that.

Keller: What is the most memorable match you ever participated in?

Sharkey: Oh, gosh, there were so many. It would be hard to say. Maybe Danny Hodge for the Light Heavyweight Championship. We had many, many—a series of matches. That might have been the most exciting. I wrestled several World Champions from Scandar Szabo to Pat O'Connor, but I think there was something about Danny Hodge. We made an awful lot of money and it drew real big, too.

Keller: How did you get started training wrestlers?

Sharkey: Well, I bought a gym Downtown (in Minneapolis). Ron Peterson, who's a boxing promoter, and I started training wrestlers together. That's where we trained Jesse Ventura and Bob Backlund.

Keller: Were those your first two students?

Sharkey: Yeah, but we had some others with them who weren't very good. I can't even remember their names. Then I quit and that was it. It's funny, the people who talked me back into it were a strange pair—Road Warrior Animal and Pietrov, Al Blake of all people. I didn't want to do it, and Hawk went and talked to Jesse and asked, "What should I do?" and Jesse said, "Well, give 'em some money. So I was sitting down at the Market Barbeque and they all came in. And the Hawk was the ring leader and they all were there—Rude and Darsow and Al Blake and Animal and all of them. And Hawk came up and gave me 500 dollars and I said, "We're in business. Sit down my boy." And from then on I was in camp the next day. It was one of the most exciting things I've done in my life. It was like Cinderella story for them and I enjoyed it. It was unbelievable that I could do something like that. I didn't think I had it in me, but of course look at the talent I had to work with. I told them something and they could do it five minutes later. They had the strength, the power, the coordination. They weren't average people, ya' know. They weren't like training an average guy now—a-days. They were so much faster, stronger, more coordinated, so much better than anyone else. It was very easy, really, and at that time I was still getting in the ring then. So I could get right in the ring. I didn't have help from anyone. Now I have help from so many people. It's so much easier now.

Keller: When you were training the Road Warriors, did you think they would go on to be as successful as they have been and revolutionize the sport?

Sharkey: I knew they'd make money. I knew they'd be successful. I know that much from my experience, but none of us dreamed it would go as it did. It was beyond our wildest dreams.

Keller: Of all the people you trained, who did you enjoy training the most?

Sharkey: Road Warriors, (Barry) Darsow, and (Rick) Rude. No doubt about it.

Keller: Of those who have been successful, who did you least enjoy training?

Sharkey: I liked everyone. Everyone who was successful had the right attitude. I've had some a—holes in the camp. They're in jail now, on the run from the law. The good guys always made it, the bad guys didn't. Of all the guys who were successful, I can say nothing bad about one of them. It's been the greatest experience of my life. Life long friends. You can't imagine how that felt to see those guys succeed. I remember, I've still got it. I saw two of my wrestlers on the cover of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*. It was Jesse Ventura wrestling Bob Backlund and I saved that and showed everybody. It got to the point if I saved every wrestling magazine cover, I couldn't stack them high enough. I'd need to have another room just for the magazines. It was such a thrill when The Road Warriors were first on the cover. I brought it down and it was the biggest thing that happened in North East Minneapolis in years. One cover story, and now they're everywhere.

Keller: How do you like the major changes that have occurred in pro wrestling in the '80s?

Sharkey: Well, I like it for the simple reason that my guys have succeeded and that means I've succeeded. If they succeed, then I succeed. People don't realize the money I made off the Road Warriors in my camp. It was the year after they were successful—I couldn't handle it all. I had money stacked up on my desk like you wouldn't believe. I had people like Rick Steiner come in from Michigan. You know, guys who were easy to train. It was great. But wrestling is better without the territories for me. It's good because we've all got more to shoot for now. It's a strange, strange business. Hell, if you're good, there's still room for ya'. My guys are getting booked every day. I got three more guys going to Calgary. I've got Jeff Warner in Portland. They're working all they want. They're working here and when they're ready to go there's still territories out there. There's still room for good wrestlers. Everywhere we go, my guys seem to dominate the territory.

Keller: You also referee in the Twin Cities for the World Wrestling Federation. How do you like that?

Sharkey: Oh, it's great. They take care of me financially. It's great seeing old friends hanging around the dressing room. I like just sort of hanging around with everyone and visiting. It's a big social event for me.

Keller: How did the PWA get started and what is it today?

Sharkey: Well, I started it and built it up. I've had to fight to keep it. A couple years ago I had to go to jail to keep it. I had a fight with Dave Stecker. I had (to deal with) Jim Koch's

(questionable) money. I had Dale Gagner trying to cut me up. I had to physically beat (Stecker up). It cost me thousands of dollars (in lost work) but I got rid of him. I paid a big price for it, but it's a successful promotion now. I got rid of all the people who were disloyal, people with no honor. I brought everyone together. Not only the wrestlers, but the announcers, the writers, and it all came together. It wasn't easy to do when you had to go to the workhouse every night.

Keller: Do you ever see the PWA becoming a big, full-time promotion?

Sharkey: No, I see the PWA becoming part of a big promotion, like a farm team for a big promotion. People ask why I don't call Vince McMahon or Ted Turner and make the PWA a farm team for them, and I say, "What the hell do you think it is now?" It always has been. That's all it's ever been. Except I don't get paid. But they use me as a referee and treat me well. But, no, I don't ever want to get big. I want to be part of something big.

Keller: What is the best decision you ever made in wrestling?

Sharkey: Hell, I never made a good decision in my life. I don't know why I should start now. No, really, it was a good decision to start training The Road Warriors. It was a good decision to start the PWA and to start the new training camps. The decision to train wrestlers like Tommy Ferrara and Charlie Norris. Listening to the fans. You don't need to have a big committee, just talk to the fans and they'll tell you what you need to know.

Keller: What's the worst decision you ever made?

Sharkey: Punching Stecker in Eau Claire (Wisc.) because he would have self-destructed anyway. I didn't have to do it. That was a bad decision because of what it cost me in inconvenience. I'm still having problems.

Keller: I'm going to mention a few names. Give me your thoughts on each. Wally Karbo.

Sharkey: A great guy. He started me. I owe everything to Wally Karbo.

Keller: Verne Gagne.

Sharkey: No comment... well, he didn't kick me when I was down and I'm not going to kick the poor devil when he's down. When I was in trouble, he didn't try to hurt me, and I'm not going to try to hurt him. As a matter of fact, when I was in trouble (with Stecker), Greg (Gage) was going to come over and testify on my behalf because of all the problems he had with Stecker. So I don't want to kick him when he's down either, because he's down really bad. He'll never come back. Once they're down they never come back, like Kansas City, and territories you don't ever think about anymore, Salt Lake City and Phoenix, they never come back.

Keller: Greg Gagne.

Sharkey: I like Greg. I've always gotten along good with Greg. I've known him since he was a kid. I've always liked Greg.

Keller: Dale Gagner.

Sharkey: Dale Gagner? I can say nothing good about Dale Gagner at all. Time will tell there. We'll just have to say time will tell with Dale.

Keller: Jesse Ventura.

Sharkey: Great guy. He's been a good friend for many years. He never mentions my name that I broke him into the business, but it doesn't bother me since everyone knows. But he's been a good friend and I like him very much.

Keller: Bruiser Brody.

Sharkey: Probably one of the greatest wrestlers ever. Probably one of the greatest human beings I've ever met in my life. I can say nothing but good. I have nothing but respect for him. One of the biggest tragedies in my life. I don't think I'll ever get over it. We'll all miss him.

Keller: Hulk Hogan.

Sharkey: The greatest World Champion who ever lived. He's drawn more money. He's done more than anyone. Say what you want, but he's the greatest. We're never going to see another one like him. Maybe we will someday, and if we do, it'll be from my camp.

Keller: Ric Flair.

Sharkey: He's the greatest, too. It's a situation where you've got two great World Champions from two different organizations with two different styles. You can't compare both of them. They're both great in their style and as human beings. I respect them. I kinda' like the idea of two World Champions like that. Hey, maybe one day they might wrestle each other. And wouldn't it be nice if I could referee and you could write the story?

Keller: Yes. What about the AWA's Larry Zbyszko?

Sharkey: Hell of a guy. And a good wrestler.

Keller: Charlie Norris.

Sharkey: The next really big money-maker in the business. He's a nice guy, honorable, and he's got the right attitude. That's hard to find, not only in this business, but anywhere.

Keller: Bill Apter.

Sharkey: Oh, a hell of a guy. I have a lot of respect for him. He's a great businessman. He's got a great magazine. He's respected in the business. Most fans aren't even aware of the sheets. Most fans are casual fans and it's wonderful to have a magazine like his around.

Keller: Vince McMahon.

Sharkey: I talked to Vince McMahon once in my life and I enjoyed it very much. He's a really down to earth, nice guy. He made a lot of sense. I wish I would have listened to him. There's the biggest mistake. You want to know the biggest mistake of my life? He wanted me to go work for him a few years ago. He wanted The Road Warriors. But Verne was the biggest promoter then, so I took The Road Warriors and Nord and my whole camp and I sent them to Verne. I bailed Verne out. If you remember after Hulk Hogan left and everyone left, we came in and saved his ass.

Jesse Ventura's a great guy. He's been a good friend for many years. He never mentions my name that I broke him into the business, but it doesn't bother me since everyone knows. But he's been a good friend.

With the Warriors, and of course he still had Brody and Abdullah, he had the Crusher then. And he turned on all of us. Had I listened to Vince McMahon and swung over that way, I would be a wealthy man. That's the biggest mistake of my whole wrestling career. Forget about punching (Stecker), I'd do it over again. You know what they say, it's better to fight and lose than to not have fought at all. That's a typical wrestler way of thinking.

Keller: What are your thoughts on insider wrestling newsletters?

Sharkey: I don't see them exposing anything. I plan my matches around the newsletters. I read the newsletters and some I keep. Any promoter who doesn't read the sheets is a fool, but they all do anyway, you know. I think it's one of the best things that's happened to wrestlers. No only that, it's made honest men out of a lot of people. They used to come to town from another place and you'd ask how they did. They'd say there were 6,000 people there and he made eight million dollars, and oh wow, that's wonderful. Then I pick up the sheets and see they had 200 people and probably made 30 bucks. It's kind of stopped the liars because nobody ever wants to say they wrestled in front of a small crowd and made a small amount of money. I think they're great. To me, being a new promoter, especially, they've been a great help and they will be in the future to other promoters. The promoters of the future are the ones growing up reading the sheets right now. Those are the promoters and wrestlers of tomorrow. Now we have more fan-wrestler relationships than ever before and I think the sheets have had a lot to do with that. With fans and wrestlers working together, we've done that a lot.

Keller: How long do you see yourself being involved in pro wrestling?

Sharkey: I'll be in wrestling all my life. That's all I know and that's all I care about. Because I'm around my own people. I'm around all the laughs in the dressing room. I don't miss out anything, but I don't have to take the bumps I used to.

Keller: Well, thank you for your insight and sharing your love of the business.

Sharkey: Well, I really can't knock the business. I love the business. I love the people in and around it. Although I think I'm going to start my own sheet: "Who Punched Who and How Much Time Did They Get." It's not very big, but there'd always be something in there. I hear it all.

MIKE SHAW

Mike Shaw is now wrestling as Makhan Singh in the Global Wrestling Federation. His interview and wrestling skills are now being showcased. However, when Mike Shaw was in WCW, he was saddled with the Norman the Lunatic gimmick which turned into a virtually silent kid's character which underutilized his skills. In the follow "Torch Talk" with Mike Shaw conducted in June 1991, he discusses his early days in wrestling and his attitude on the way he was treated and used by WCW.

Keller: What year did you get involved in pro wrestling?

Shaw: I got started in August of 1980 in Boston. I was trained by Killer Kowalski.

Keller: Was training to be a wrestler harder than you anticipated?

Shaw: It wasn't harder than I thought it would be. I was in really good shape. I just finished playing football and amateur wrestling. I was about 260 at the time, doing a lot of weight lifting, and running at the time. It took longer than I thought. That would be the main thing. I trained three days a week for nearly three or four months, but I thought I was ready. I kept insisting to Kowalski, who was promoting shows at the time, that I was ready and wanted to wrestle. He wouldn't let me and told me to wait until I was really ready. He never rushed anybody. When I had my first match, I realized maybe I wasn't ready yet.

Keller: Who did you wrestle in your first match?



Mike Shaw as Norman

Shaw: I wrestled a guy named "TV" Ricky Sexton in Westerly, Rhode Island. I won with a bearhug.

Keller: Did you still believe you were ready after your first match?

Shaw: Well, it's really different wrestling in a gym than it is in front of people, so that made a big difference.

Keller: How long had you thought about being a pro wrestler before you actually joined a camp?

Shaw: I really hadn't thought much about it. I was actually pursuing a professional baseball career. I was in the Milwaukee Brewer's organization and I was playing baseball in West Palm Beach, Florida and my baseball career came to an end. I was in Florida working various odd jobs and I ran into a guy in West Palm Beach at a car dealership, his name was Farmer Bill and he had wrestled down south for years. He told me I should try professional wrestling. I said, "No, I'm not interested." I kicked it around for a while and he said to try it. He told there was a wrestling school in Boston. So I contacted Kowalski.

Keller: Had you been a fan of pro wrestling while growing up?

Shaw: No. My home town in Michigan has 300 people. We had no cable TV and at that time we had two TV channels and no pro wrestling on TV. I had not seen a professional wrestling match until I was 21 years old and two years later I got into professional wrestling. Finally, when I lived in Florida, I did a few matches at West Palm Beach Auditorium and I kind of liked it and that's what got me finally interested.

Keller: Your initial fame came as Makhan Singh in the Calgary Stampede Promotion. How did you end up in Calgary?

Shaw: I worked around the New England area, around Boston, Maine, Vermont, all that area for spot shows. I got lucky enough to hook up for about a month on the road with Vince McMahon Sr. when it was still the World Wide Wrestling Federation. My fourth match was in Boston Garden in front of a sellout, so I was pretty nervous. I just sent a bunch of pictures and letters to all the different promoters I dug up addresses for. I actually went for ten months to Vancouver, first for Al Tomko and Gene Kiniski. They owned Northwest Championship Wrestling. I wrestled as Klondike Mike, a lumberjack.

It came Christmas time and that territory closed up every year for two weeks at Christmas. Being young in the business, I wanted to work wherever I could and Stu Hart called me in Vancouver and told me he had ten days worth of battle royals going on over the holidays, a kind of a holiday thing he ran every year. He needed a couple of big guys for battle royals. So I went over to Calgary from Vancouver and they liked me and I ended up just staying and never returned to Vancouver.

Keller: Do you look back at your early days fondly or with some regrets?

Shaw: I look back at the ten months in

Vancouver as really grueling. We ran the whole territory at that time with six guys. We all wrestled in a singles match and went back out and wrestled a six-man tag every night. But being young in the business I guess it was good for me to get the experience. I had three or four hundred matches within ten months there, not counting numerous battle royals when we were short some guys.

The Calgary days were good for me. I learned a lot about the business and I got to do a lot of TV interviews and TV talking and even a bit of announcing, so it got me used to the TV aspect of the business more than Vancouver did.

Keller: You got many compliments on your work as color commentary in Calgary. Did it surprise you that you were so talented behind the mic?

Shaw: It didn't surprise me being comfortable behind the mic. What surprised me, I was in the middle of my run against Owen Hart and at that time, trying to go in there and be their top heel, the fans started to like me because of my announcing. Ed Whalen had been the announcer there so long and he was kind of dry and I was kind of cocky and boisterous at the time and the teenage kids and the young adults started to like me. It was kind of like Jesse Ventura. He got so popular. With me, it was a smaller scale, naturally. It may have hurt my performance, but it was a good experience for me to announce.

Keller: A lot of wrestlers would love to have a series of matches against Owen Hart. How was it for you to wrestle Owen Hart?

Shaw: He's probably still the best guy I ever wrestled. We did a lot of great things together and put good matches together. Stu Hart admitted to me a couple months ago that the last summer Owen and I were around the territory together was the best summer he had done in four years, so we had a good run. Still, today, when I go into restaurants in Calgary people ask me if I'm ever going to come back and wrestle Owen Hart. I guess we left it good enough to try it again some time.

Keller: Would you like to return someday?

Shaw: I really would like to go back to Calgary some day. I like the situation that has been going on up there with everybody in the world trying to be a promoter. We'll have to see. I've heard rumors of Stu wanting to promote again or possibly one of the kids.

Keller: Do you feel your character then had a lot more creative control and took advantage of your talents better than Norman?

Shaw: What really hurt me when I went to WCW was, when they called me originally to come in, they told me they liked three things I had done. They liked how aggressively I wrestled for my size, they liked the bumps I took for my size, and they liked my interviews. I got to WCW and they told me not to do any one of those things. Don't do any wrestling moves, don't take any bumps, and don't talk. So what do I do when those are the three things they brought me in for?

Keller: When the Norman the Lunatic

character was first presented to you, was that something you thought had potential?

Shaw: Yeah, when they brought me in it was a weird situation. They brought me in from Calgary to Atlanta just to do some interviews and I had made a commitment to do an eight week tour of South Africa. So I went and did my interviews in Atlanta at CNN and I went back up to Calgary and wrestled for one night and then flew out to South Africa the next day and when I came back, the whole character had been changed from being a wild, aggressive more or less repackaged Makhan Singh to being a lunatic who didn't talk or do anything else. In that eight week span, the character got changed a lot.

Keller: Do you believe you were vastly underutilized by WCW?

Shaw: Oh, yes. I've had many people tell me, promoters, guys who I worked with... I just wrestled last week in Winnipeg for the West-Four Wrestling Alliance. I wrestled Jim Brunzell and after the show, I had to do three interviews. I had three pretty big name wrestlers—Baron Von Raschke and a couple of other guys walked up to me and said, "Geez, I can't believe they didn't let you talk down there for two years." So when you got wrestlers noticing I was being wasted, I can't imagine how a promotion didn't realize I was being wasted.

Keller: What do you think about the WCW organization overall?

Shaw: I just had a really hard time cutting through the politics of their business. They didn't let me do my thing and when the Norman character finally got established and got over—thanks to the work of Terry Funk and Eddie Gilbert at the time because they helped me a lot with the character at the time—they didn't know what to do with it. When it came time to get rid of me, they didn't hesitate getting rid of me. I think Sting and Luger and several top guys went to the office and said, "Look, you're getting rid of the wrong guy, he's really over." But unfortunately they don't listen to them or anybody else.

Keller: You worked under the leadership of Jim Herd, Ole Anderson, and Ric Flair. Do you respect them as leaders or promoters?

Shaw: I think Herd was put in a bad position to run a company when he was pretty unfamiliar with the wrestling business and with wrestlers in general. It's pretty hard to deal with 40 or 50 wrestlers who all want to be on top.

As far as Flair went, he was pretty happy with some of my matches when he was the head booker. I got along fairly good with Flair.

I have no respect for Ole at all. He is more or less the reason I'm not working there now. He came in and took my Norman character and just destroyed it overnight. He kind of held a gun to a lot of our heads and said, "If it wasn't for you guys being under contract, you'd be fired today." He put the Trucker thing on me and promised big things and never did a thing with it. He gave me three TV matches in five months, so it was kind of hard to stay established. I had gotten 420 teddy bears in the arenas in four months. When you're striving to get something over to children,

why destroy that overnight. The only thing I disagree with Herd about was why did he let (Ole) do that to me. But they claimed Ole was in charge of all wrestling, but now everyone can see where that went. WCW ended up in the worst shape they'd ever been in.

My biggest problem with working for that company was I never knew who was in charge. One day Herd would say we're going to do this with you, the next day the committee would say we're going to do this with you. And the next day the committee's gone. The next day a guy nobody got along with, Ole, was in charge and he was threatening to fire all of us. Ole and I didn't speak to each other for about three months.

Keller: Who do you think would have been a better option to hire as booker than Ole Anderson?

Shaw: For the type of characters they were trying to develop and the market they were trying to go to, in my opinion there was only one guy that should have been hired as booker, and that is Terry Funk. His name was kicked around there for a while. He had some great ideas. Unfortunately for him when he came up with ideas back when there was a committee, there were enough people to shoot 'em down that a lot of his stuff didn't get through. He's creative. I kind of attested to him being in the movies. He's kept ahead of the business where a lot of guys his age went back and regressed in the business who still think we can do it with newspaper ads and posters; you can't. You've got to be ahead. One of the biggest things they've had in WCW is they haven't had a booker in there with fresh ideas and they're too worried about what the WWF is doing. If they would just worry about themselves, they might have a chance.

Keller: When you were with them, what do you think were some of the things WCW was doing right as an organization?

Shaw: I think the things they do right are probably having the free Clashes. I think there is a great potential for a large TV audience with those. Unfortunately they give away so much, I think it hurts their house show attendance.

Keller: How do they fight that catch-22 situation where too much on TV hurts house show attendance, but not enough on TV lowers ratings so nobody knows about the house shows?

Shaw: What you should be doing is drawing your house shows off your TV and when you've got that schedule of five hours of TV a week, maybe - I talked to Terry Funk a few days ago, and he agrees that they might be making too much TV. People can sit at home and watch it everyday at home on TV, so why bring your family out and spend 75 bucks to watch it. But, it's a TV company, not a wrestling company, and they're interested in selling their commercials and their stuff off of TV, pay-per-views, and Clashes. I don't think some of the TBS people even care if they have ten people in the arenas as long as they're selling those commercials.

What really hurt me when I went to WCW was, when they called me originally to come in, they told me they liked three things I had done. They liked how aggressively I wrestled for my size, they liked the bumps I took for my size, and they liked my interviews. I got to WCW and they told me not to do any one of those things.

Keller: Jim Herd has gone on record saying the number one priority for WCW is television ratings on TBS.

Shaw: That's right, that's all they're apparently worried about. There's been some talk since I left that they might be interested in cancelling all house shows and just doing TV and pay-per-views. It would be less of a loss, because that's where they're losing their money flying people all over the country. When you have to purchase 30 plane tickets to draw 300 people, it is a money loser.

Keller: If you had a lot of managerial influence during your days in WCW, what are some of the other suggestions you would have, and not just necessarily WCW, but any wrestling company?

Shaw: I think what you're going to have to see in the wrestling business in order for the wrestling business to survive - the WWF's always going to survive - personally I would like to see all the small territories come back. I think that's the best thing for the wrestling business. When I broke into the wrestling business, between Canada and the United States, I had about twenty-five promoters I could call up any time and ask for work. Now it's down to two or three, and some of them aren't worth really going to, ya' know, Wade. I mean, it's tough working Portland and Tennessee for 35 bucks or 25 bucks a night. But eventually I would like to see the small territories come back.

Keller: Do you think that is possible with the oversaturation of wrestling on cable, or will it take less wrestling for that to happen?

Shaw: Yeah, it'll take a lot less wrestling everywhere. But you look at some of these states, like Texas and New York, the two big offices are only concerned with hitting maybe the five, six big cities in all these states. There's a lot of cities with fifty, sixty thousand people in them that never get wrestling. That was the bread and butter in these promotions for years.

In WCW, I would make the world champion a lot stronger. The WWF was so successful in building Hulk Hogan as such a strong champion and building guys up to challenge Hogan. I think that's a way they should go, too. I think they missed the boat with Sid Vicious. I think they should have made him World Champion and have guys just challenge him and challenge him.

Keller: You talked about the WWF always being around. Do you believe WCW could ever be significant competition for the WWF? Will it take the same style or a different style of promoting than the WWF?

Shaw: I think it will take a different style. I think right now they've got such big names at the WWF, I see that in coming back to my hometown here in northern Michigan where there's no live wrestling and not that much TV wrestling. But I have ten kids walk up to me and ask me about wrestling and every one of them will ask me about a WWF character. I've never had one kid walk up to me and say, "What about Ric Flair?" or "What about Sting?" or "What about Luger?" Nothing against those guys, it's just that the WWF has an aura about it that they're the top one. I even had a kid in my hometown ask me where I've been wrestling and I said, "I've been wrestling in the NWA for the last two years." Their next statement always is, "Are you going to make the big one, the WWF?" That's how they look at it. They're the major leagues and the rest are just chasing them.

Keller: So will it take WCW establishing themselves as "number one" with a different age group or a group looking for a different approach to pro wrestling, just like what happens in Japan with SWS, New Japan, and the UWF?

Shaw: Right. I don't think they can figure out which age group they are trying to chase down there in WCW. They go through these periods where they have nothing but guys marketed toward kids and the next thing ya' know they bring in every guy in the world and are bleeding and brawling. It seems like it changes every six months.

Keller: Do you believe that wrestling in America will ever have the chance to be

respected by the mainstream public, just as is the case to a greater degree in Japan?

Shaw: I don't think wrestling will ever get respect in the United States anymore. It's so much entertainment. You see ten articles about professional wrestling, and most are a knock or a joke or a slam on wrestling. I think the only major event that is ever reported on the news is Wrestlemania. You might see a small, small matchbook sized list of results on the back page or something, but that's only if a fan or somebody calls it in, probably. I don't think there's a guy down there covering it as a sporting event.

Keller: Do you think there is even potential for the Japanese style of promoting to work in America and then, after a couple years, have the press possibly buy into it?

Shaw: I think with the amount of press in the United States, I don't think wrestling could get the kind of press it gets in Japan. I just don't see that. Japan still tries to run it like an international thing. They make a big deal out of it when Americans come in. They have a little bit of different interest. Over here, if we said we had five Russians and five Germans, the first thing a person would ask would be, "Well, are they really Russians or Germans?" There's always that disbelief because it's pro wrestling.

Keller: If there were three things at the snap of a finger you could change about the way WCW was run, what would they be?

Shaw: I think they would have to reestablish all of their top talent. I think a lot of those guys have been there too long. Nothing against the guys, but I think they've all wrestled each other, they've all teamed up against each other, they've all challenged each other. And I think the people are a little tired of that. I would make the world champion a lot stronger. The WWF was so successful in building Hulk Hogan as such a strong champion and building guys up to challenge Hogan. I think that's a way they should go, too. I think they missed the boat with Vicious. I think they should have made him World Champion and have guys just challenge him and challenge him. I guess he'll wrestle Hogan next. Either that or he'll be built as the next Hogan. I would also try to cut back on giving them so much on TV. They're so worried about TV ratings that they're giving them everything on TV. You don't see the WWF having to worry about giving viewers a main event match on TV every week. WCW's so worried about ratings, who had the best shares, and are admitting they don't care about what happens in the arenas.

Keller: Mark Madden wanted me to ask you, if you could kill somebody legally, who would it be?

Shaw: (laughs) Wow, I don't know if you have enough paper to write all of that. Probably Ole Anderson would be on top of that list - by far.

Keller: Since we already talked about Ole, who would be the distant number two?

Shaw: Ahh, I guess I can't say Ole again. There are a bunch of guys tied for number two.

DAVID SHULTS

David Shults is best known for slapping ABC reporter John Stossel on Dec. 28, 1984 backstage at Madison Square Garden. Shults was questioned by Stossel if wrestling was fake, and slapping Stossel was Shults's way of responding. A few months later, Shults was fired from the WWF for an out of ring altercation with Mr. T. Since that incident, Shults, who wrestled for 10 years until that 1984 incident, has dropped out of wrestling and is now a full-time bounty hunter. Shults, though, has some strong opinions on the direction pro wrestling has taken and has especially strong opinions on Hulk Hogan's attempts to sell himself to the public as a drug-free hero. The following "Torch Talk" interview was conducted by Wade Keller on Jan. 12, 1991.

Wade Keller: What was the reason you were fired from the WWF soon after the 20/20 feature aired where you hit John Stossel?

David Shults: I've been told many things. I've been told because it was because of the confrontation with Mr. T. And I was told by Vince McMahon that there was no reason; he said he didn't need a reason. I want to make clear, I have a lawsuit against nobody. I'm in the process of writing a book about the whole world of professional wrestling. I'm talking about the drugs, the sexual abuse, the sexual harassment, the diseases involved in these wrestlers, and the reason I'm speaking out on this is I finally got contacted by somebody who wanted to talk about it. Nobody's ever wanted to talk about it. Everything I say I can prove and document.

Keller: When you were in the AWA when Hulk Hogan's popularity really bloomed, did you foresee him becoming a national superstar like he has?

Shults: While he was with the AWA and Verne Gagne, Vince McMahon sent one of his people out to talk to Hulk Hogan about making the move. He knew he was making the move two to three months before he actually left. He deceived all the people there. He hid it behind Verne Gagne's back. The day I knew I was going to leave, I walked in and told Verne Gagne I was leaving. I was told to stay in the AWA, in other words, stay there and wrestle until Vince McMahon wanted me to come to the WWF. So when I left and Hogan left and eventually Gene Okerlund left, it was a corporate take-over of unimaginable magnitude.

Keller: Did you foresee that the WWF would become the national number one promotion it has become or were you somewhat skeptical of what Vince McMahon was attempting to do?

Shults: I sat down with Vince and Hogan and we were discussing everything. The way he had it laid out and planned out. I had no doubt he could do it. This guy pulled off a total takeover of professional wrestling.

Keller: Could McMahon have pulled it off without Hulk Hogan?

Shults: Yeah, he could have done it with anybody. Hulk Hogan was the guy he wanted. But he could have done it with Jesse Ventura or Billy Graham or Ken Patera or Roddy Piper.

Keller: Moving now back to your days with the WWF, can you explain why you hit John Stossel that night in Madison Square Garden?

Shults: Okay. The reason I hit John Stossel was because I was ordered to go out and blast him and a few other words you don't need to hear. What I'm saying is I was told to do it in a way that I did. The bottom line was to make him respect pro wrestling. He was making a joke out of pro wrestling. That's not what people saw. They saw me as the bad guy sitting there watching this whole show and going out with poor John Stossel and hitting him on the face and he goes and runs off and gets big bruises. There's so much untold on this 20/20 deal and they've never given me a chance to come on there and explain it. Nobody wants to know what really happened. I was used, I was set up. They used me to hit John Stossel. They used me to get the answer John Stossel wanted out of me. He wanted a rise out of me, otherwise he wouldn't have said what he said about professional wrestling. Even today, I'm not a fake. I was an entertainer, an exhibitionist, whatever you call it. But I wasn't a fake. There's a lot of difference.

Keller: I agree that fake is the wrong term to use.

Shults: The big thing here, though, is steroids. Hulk Hogan introduced me to steroids in '78. Without steroids I would have never made it to the WWF. Hogan would have never made it. Billy Graham wouldn't have made it. None of these people would have made it to the WWF or the top of any other professional wrestling circuit in the late-70s, 80s, and today. There's no way you can go and be a pro wrestler if you're not taking steroids. You're not going to be on top. You're going to be the guy who gets his butt whipped every week on TV and you're not going to make the top bucks. In other words, it's demanded of you to take steroids. You're going to have to take steroids to work the main event or anywhere near the main event on the card.

Keller: What was the difference between the steroid use in the AWA and the WWF?

Shults: If Verne Gagne knew somebody was doing steroids, he would have fired them on the spot. If he knew somebody was doing marijuana, cocaine, heroine, or other kinds of drugs, he would have fired them on the spot. Verne Gagne was the best promoter I ever worked for. I walked in and told him I quit one day on the orders of Vince McMahon, but I want to assure you that all over the world I've worked for a lot of promoters, and this is one guy who always stood up for professional wrestling, amateur wrestling, wrestling in general. My opinion is he would have fired anyone on the spot if he knew they were doing steroids.

Keller: So there was steroid use that Verne didn't know about?

Shults: We were using steroids in the AWA. I think 90 percent of the wrestlers are using

steroids and I would imagine it was 60 or 70 percent back then. You've gotta be big. You've gotta be able to take care of yourself. But there is no way to get as big as these guys are without steroids. I don't care what anyone else says. When I started in pro wrestling, I weighed 220 pounds and I got up to almost 300. Let me make something clear, though. I am not here to knock steroids. There are a lot of misconceptions of why Billy Graham says what he says, why Lyle Alzado says what he says, why Hulk Hogan says what he says. I'm saying without steroids I would have never made it in the WWF. But, if I had stayed in the WWF, I may have come down with the problems Billy Graham is having. I don't know if steroids caused his problems or not. I can't say they did. I can't say they didn't. But I used steroids and I hope five or ten years down the road if I'm still living that I don't have the problems he has, and I'm sure I won't because I never abused them the way he did. And without steroids, if he got off steroids then, there would have been no Billy Graham. Same thing with Hogan.

Keller: Before we move much further into the steroid discussion, what is it that you are doing these days now that you're out of wrestling?

Shults: Currently I'm the best bounty hunter in the country, not taking anything away from any other bounty hunters out there. I've picked up over 500 people over the last four years. I'm the most sought after bounty hunter. I've gone as far as Egypt to bring people back. I'm also a licensed private investigator through the state of Connecticut. I'm still training pro wrestlers. A lot have come through my school and the ones that do make it through my classes end up pretty good. The main thing is that I'm a bounty hunter.

Keller: Is bounty hunting more dangerous than professional wrestling?

Shults: Oh yeah. You've gotta respect the laws. You work with local police departments and the local governments when you're going after these people who have skipped bond. You have to treat these people with the respect they deserve. You don't mistreat them. When I find them, they have to go, they have no choice.

Keller: How were you first introduced to steroids?

Shults: In 1978 Hogan supplied me with them. When I first knew Hulk Hogan, I knew him as Terry, then he went as Sterling Golden, then he moved up to Hulk Hogan. He was trying to make it in pro wrestling. He came into the Pensacola area. I was working for the Southeastern Wrestling Association then. We became close friends. I had never used steroids before. I didn't know what they were. You have to remember, I'm from Tennessee, I'm from the South down in the woods. We don't hear about that stuff. Then this guy walked in and I said, if this is who I'm going to be fighting, I need to hit the gym. After I started using them I went from 220 to almost 300. It didn't bother me. I'm not knocking the use of steroids under the supervision of a doctor. I cannot prove they hurt you. I cannot prove they don't hurt you. What I'm saying is they never

I was told to stay in the AWA, in other words, stay there and wrestle until Vince McMahon wanted me to come to the WWF. So when I left and Hogan left and eventually Gene Okerlund left, it was a corporate take-over of unimaginable magnitude.

hurt me. They did great things for me. They got me where I was. They got Hogan where he was.

Keller: Do you agree with the steroid testing policy of the WWF? Should wrestlers be able to freely use steroids?

Shults: Here's what I think. I don't say their policy is any good, but I don't say they should do it another way. But if it's the WWF, they're going to find who they want positive and who they wanted negative. If the WWF wrestlers can get by with steroids, why not let everyone? What's good for one should be good for the other. Drug tests are not hard to pass. They're a very simple thing to test unless you draw blood or something like that.

Keller: Should steroids be legal?

Shults: What I'm saying is if one person can do it and go on national TV and tell them he never did steroids and then sell vitamins on TV, then he tells kids that if you take your vitamins and say you're prayers you're going to grow up like me, 300, 24 inch arms—now, if he's able to do that on national TV, insulting the wrestling fans and the people of this country... They're saying they can tell you something and that's the bottom line and you shouldn't ask questions.

Keller: How far along is the book you're working on?

Shults: It's going slow. I've got maybe the first quarter done. I'm having to go really deep and get notarized statements from wrestlers who have seen the same things I have. I want to be able to prove the things I'm writing about beyond a shadow of a doubt. It should be done before the end of the year.

Keller: Can you preview what the book will contain?

Shults: It will talk about how pro wrestling works, the corporate takeover by Vince McMahon, how wrestlers betray each other, how Vince McMahon turned on all the promoters. Vince McMahon Jr., his father was a man you could rely on. Verne Gagne was that way. All of these promoters were that way. You could rely on their word. You didn't need all of these contracts. There's an iceberg here and steroids are just the

When Hulk Hogan appeared on Arsenio, I knew there was no way he would come out and tell of the amount of steroids he's used and how long he's been on them. But, I had no idea—like somebody dropped a thousand pound safe on my head—when this guy said he took steroids only three times for muscle tears. I mean, to insult the public like this and to tell the kids out there he doesn't take steroids is crazy.

tip. There's diseases. We're talking social drugs. We're talking about convicted felons working in professional wrestling being licensed by athletic commissions that strictly forbid felons or association with convicted felons. We're talking about some of the top executives' sexual habits, they're sexual preferences, sexual abuse and harassment. It goes so deep and I'm going to prove everything that's in my book.

Keller: What was your impression of Hulk Hogan on Arsenio Hall?

Shults: I knew there was no way he would come out and tell of the amount of steroids he's used and how long he's been on them. But, I had no idea—like somebody dropped a thousand pound safe on my head—when this guy said he took steroids only three times for muscle tears. I mean, to insult the public like this and to tell the kids out there he doesn't take steroids is crazy. There's nothing wrong with going to the gym, saying your prayers, and takin' your vitamins, but he's insinuating that if you take his vitamins and go to the gym, they're going to be just like him. He's a role model, the most recognizable person in the world, and he's coming on national TV and telling people everyone else is wrong, they're lying and, "No, I did not take steroids. Trust me." To me, lying to the youth of America, telling that lie, is the worst thing he ever did. If he came out and told them the truth, then the public would forgive if he told that he was on steroids and is now getting off and he wants to keep their faith and trust. I cannot believe this guy. I still can't believe he did that. I mean, I gave Hogan steroids. I've injected him with steroids. I bought steroids from him. He gave me steroids. He showed me how to use them and was the first person to ever talk about steroids to me. I

have letters of notarized documentation proving all of this. It's not just me saying this. I can prove it beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Keller: Could Hulk Hogan get away with admitting all that he has done or is it too late?

David Shults: I think it's too late. He would never tell all he's done. If he did, they would probably arrest him (laughs). But, he can come out and say, "I got carried away, I lied to you, I'm sorry." That's what I'd like to see him do. If he does that, well, God bless him, he's made a lot of money. But don't lie. He's a role model. Every store you go into, it's Hulk Hogan this, Hulk Hogan that. He went on Arsenio Hall and right after that, I asked to go on, but no way. Why let this guy come out and tell this lie when it's been proven different so many times?

Keller: Realistically, what do you see as Hulk Hogan's future?

Shults: I think he's going to run up on a lot of health problems for his steroid use if that is what caused Billy Graham's problems. If they decide that is the cause of Billy Graham's problems, then I think Hogan will experience the same thing. The toy manufacturers and all will understand they can't let a role model lie to the kids and keep their sales up. I'm sure this will hurt sales.

Keller: What are your feelings on the changes in professional wrestling over the last ten years from a lot of regional promotions where a lot of wrestlers were working to a situation now where there are more national promotions, but less wrestlers being able to develop and work full-time?

Shults: Well, it's really a shame that they've got wrestling into the position it's in, merchandising being the stress with no attention to wrestling at all. Everybody used to get to see professional wrestling no matter how small their town was. Now there's just a couple national promotions trying to monopolize on everything. There's contractual agreements where they can stop you from wrestling for someone else. They took the wrestling and made it into a multi-million dollar merchandising company. That's what it is, a merchandising company. They're making cartoon characters out of them. They're making storybook, cartoon books out of them. They're watching these cartoon shows and buying the dolls and spending the parents' hard-earned money. That's what's happening to wrestling and I think it's a shame.

Keller: Overall, do you think Vince McMahon has been good for wrestling?

Shults: I don't know if you could say overall. I think he's destroyed professional wrestling as far as professional wrestling goes. I think he's got an entertainment business that is making him mega-bucks, by coming in and running over all the local promoters, running them out of business, buying their TV stations out from under them, working deals with all these TV stations, and a corporate take-over is what I call it. There are kids that will never get to go to a live professional wrestling show. The WWF will never go to a town of 2,500 people and those

people used to have a chance to see wrestlers in person. Not in this day in time.

Keller: Do you think national expansion was inevitable and that somebody would have done it if it wasn't McMahon?

Shults: I don't know. That's kind of a hard question because the promoters in general all had an agreement. They had territories and areas that they worked. It was kinda like an agreement—you don't come in my area, I won't come in yours. I'll run this town, you run that town. It worked out great for everybody. Now it's just McMahon and a few other organizations. If you take a family—a wife, a husband, and three kids—it's going to cost 100 buck. It's hard for the average working guy to take his family to a wrestling card.

Keller: Let's talk about a time when there were regional promotions, that being when you got started in professional wrestling. When did you begin wrestling and who trained you?

Shults: 1974 in Tennessee, Herb Welch trained me.

Keller: What got you interested in becoming a professional wrestler?

Shults: I had done many jobs after coming out of the Army. I was delivering for a welding company and I went by Herb Welch's house. He told me if I thought I had what it took, he would train me. You know, I was a good sized guy, around 215, 220 pounds. I took him up on it. I'd make two to three trips a week to Memphis, that's probably a 125 mile round trip. He put me through some rough training for about five months because he never gave me any indication that it wouldn't be an all-out fight. I took it the hard way. He did everything he could to discourage me. But he couldn't do it because I was really fighting.

Keller: Was anyone else training with him at the time?

Shults: Well, they'd bring people in off the circuit from Nashville to work out with me. He didn't tell them I didn't know anything either, he just said, "This guy wants to be a wrestler." So they'd come and try to beat me. Of course, I wouldn't let them beat me because I was really fighting. Some of the guys didn't like what I was doing, but there was nothing they could do about it. Because where I grew up, if you didn't fight, you didn't walk the streets.

Keller: Where did you grow up?

Shults: In Madison County, just outside Memphis.

Keller: You trained five months before you wrestled in front of a crowd?

Shults: I wrestled in Missouri for Henry Rogers in December of '74 when I had my first professional match. It was, like, \$25 and cost me \$35 to make the town. But you had to get the experience. It was in front of hillbilly, redneck farmers; I'm not saying that in a derogatory way. I mean, I'm a redneck and hillbilly. These fans were rough. You'd have a gang of them waiting to fight you after the match. I'd have to work five

or six times a night. I'd manage, work a singles, a tag, a six-man, and a battle royal. That's the way the small towns were run. But I was getting experience.

Keller: Were there ever times in the first year or so of wrestling that you wanted to get out of it?

Shults: Oh yeah, yeah. There were a lot of hard times trying to get in and prove yourself, get a break you want and letting them know they could trust you. You see, the thing about professional wrestling back in those days, it was more like—I'm using this word as symbol for people to relate to—it was like the mob. You didn't get in unless you could prove yourself, unless somebody trained you and put you through the paces and you knew the rules and what went along with it. You kept your mouth shut, you didn't talk to nobody. It was strictly forbidden to ride with each other and be seen with each other. You could ride with each other, but you had to sneak around. It was strictly babyface and heel. If you did talk, somebody might just break your leg. That's the way it was back then. That's the way it was when Hogan was trying to get in. In Pensacola, that's what gave him that in, his ability to get these steroids, huge amounts of steroids.

Keller: Would you say that was how Hogan made it in the business, in with the "boys."

Shults: If somebody comes in, like in a room full of kids and one guy walks in and ain't got nothin' in his hands and the next guy comes in and he's got a handful of candy, you know who they're going to. And that's the way it was. But like I said, he wasn't a bad guy. He was a nice guy. We were really close. As a matter of fact, he was probably the best friend I ever had in professional wrestling until he turned his back on me. It really hurt me when he turned his back on me. I couldn't believe that from a person you brought into your home, you fed him, you gave him a place to sleep, you helped him through the hard times of getting into the business.

Keller: How exactly did he turn his back on you?

Shults: With Vince McMahon, I know for a fact that he went to Vince and told him that I was going to whip his ass. I know that for a fact in sworn deposition. Also, he couldn't warn me that Vince was going to do this to me, set me up, fire me, was going to get rid of me after I went into the WWF and put him over and let him win the matches that made him a star in the WWF right off. With Verne, we'd run all these towns and Hogan and myself were main eventing all these towns and we had a battle going on. So when we came back to Minneapolis for the first time with the WWF, the last time that I wrestled Hogan in Minneapolis was the night I went to the hospital with 18 stitches. Vince McMahon filmed this match and never told me, and the next thing I know it's out on video cassette. And I had no contract with him at this time. Hogan knew about all this. I guess greed got to him. The money was there. Vince might've told him either Shults goes and you don't associate with him or we're not going to push you too hard. Hogan was easily

manipulated. That's one of McMahon's fears, I think. He feared Hogan getting too strong and Hogan pushing for me or someone to be in there with him. The more people you get that don't go along with the program, the harder time you are going to have taking over a business like that.

Keller: I remember his t-shirt that read, "One Scar, A Thousand Enemies." I'm sure he's got more than one scar now, and he probably has nearly a thousand enemies.

Shults: The one scar, I don't know if you know the story, but it was supposed to be Saito's trophy. But it wasn't that. It was a growth. One has to wonder if that was caused by steroids or not. He told me it was. My wife heard him say that, too. But it wasn't Saito's trophy. It was a growth he had cut out.

Keller: When you first ran into Hogan in Pensacola, how big was he then?

Shults: He was probably 280 to 300, maybe more. I gotta think when he was on the Johnny Carson Show in '82, '83, when he was 320 pounds and he couldn't even catch his breath, he was so pumped up. He had been doing steroids for a long time. Zahorian was doing the WWF a favor, selling steroids, and Vince knew this. Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder could see this. The guy knew it and even got some himself.

Keller: Stepping back to the AWA, when Hogan was there, at what point did you sense that maybe his ego was taking over or was he still genuine?

Shults: No, he was still genuine. We were real close. Even through the first year in the WWF we were close. Then I started seeing the change in him. When I started having these confrontations with these fans that wanted to beat the hell out of me because they saw me on TV with a rented wife and kids—they weren't my real wife and kids, but they rented them for me on the TNT cable show—then they showed me with a shotgun going off in this pre-planned stuff. It was Vince McMahon's way of making me the most vicious person in the business. He didn't care for no one but Dr. D. He wanted me to be that way. The meaner I was, the more money I drew. Hogan and I were on top all the way around. He figured, "Here I am, I've got the main event for Verne Gagne and I'm going to all his towns and making a big move on all his towns. Of course, Verne didn't have anything after that. Hogan really was Verne's downfall. When he left and I left right after him, we put a big dent in Verne Gagne's whole organization. But that was the plan Vince McMahon had built up or has perpetrated, as Billy Graham would say (laughs).

Keller: It surprised me that you were so complimentary of Verne Gagne earlier because so many wrestlers don't have a lot of good to say about him. They say he deceived them, he lied, he had a temper, and he didn't treat his wrestlers well.

Shults: I think he respected me more because he knew I was brought up the old way and I could take care of myself. I wasn't going to play to him or anyone in the business. It's like I told him at the TV station when I quit, I told him,

He's a role model, the most recognizable person in the world, and, to me, lying to the youth of America, telling that lie, is the worst thing he ever did. If he came out and told them the truth, then the public would forgive if he told that he was on steroids and is now getting off and he wants to keep their faith and trust. I cannot believe this guy. I still can't believe he did that. I mean, I gave Hogan steroids. I've injected him with steroids. I bought steroids from him. He gave me steroids. He showed me how to use them and was the first person to ever talk about steroids to me.

"You're an old man now, you're not young no more. You can't beat me. You might beat other people, but you can't beat me." I've seen him cuss Hulk Hogan like a dog and call him all kinds of things, but that was the way Verne was.

Keller: Why would he cuss Hogan?

Shults: Because Hogan would do something he didn't like. He would tell him to do something, and Hogan wouldn't do it. Verne was a perfectionist. He wanted it right. If he told you to do something, that's what he wanted. If he told you to go to the store to get him a Pepsi-Cola, that's what he wanted. He didn't want a Coca-a-Cola. Verne was a businessman. He never lied to me. He did everything he said he'd do for me. He treated me good. I guess I betrayed him because of the promises made to me by Vince McMahon. Naturally, when somebody is offering in the range of \$250,000 a year and the promise to never have to find work or move again, I'm going to go there and not stay with Verne, especially when I could see his downfall coming. Gene Okerlund knew, but not everyone else knew. There's this big thing about a corporate take-over, how Vince McMahon did this. It's all gonna' be in the book I'm working on. I know exactly how he did it.

Keller: What are your personal feelings about Vince McMahon Jr. and dealing with him?

Shults: When I went to McMahon, I met with McMahon Jr. only. I met McMahon Sr. in '83. Senior, his reputation was great. He had the greatest reputation of all the promoters. He told you something, that's it. His word was his bond. Naturally, you get that feeling then, when he tells you not to worry, we've got big plans for you, and I had already been reassured that with Jr. also. So I knew Jr. was fixing to take over, Sr. was very sick and passed away a short time thereafter. Junior and I got along good because I believed everything he said. I didn't think a person could go back on their word so quick. I didn't think a law could allow that. I bought a home in Connecticut—like I needed a house, I had two in Tennessee—but he told me to go ahead and buy it. I don't regret it, I'm still doing great. I'm making more money now than I've ever made in wrestling.

Keller: Looking at your final days in the WWF, a lot had to do with Mr. T, and we talked about it earlier. What was it about the situation with Mr. T that got you so angry?

Shults: In L.A. in September of '84, a fan jumped up, spit beer on me, threw beer on me, and I pushed him back. A fan in the crowd threw him back up to me, and he came up like he was going to hit me, so naturally I hit him. Then Mr. T jumps up and said, "Hey, you can't treat that fan like that." I jumped back in the ring and told him, "Hey, come up here and I'll make you shine my shoes, bring your gold with you." He said no way. Then Feb. 11 Mr. T tried to come in the dressing room in L.A., but it was a restricted area, wrestlers only. I told him he couldn't come in. He said he was coming in to see some guys. I said, "No you ain't going nowhere. You're not coming in this dressing room." So his bodyguards stepped up and I said, "Hey, you all ain't coming in, either. Nobody's going past me. I'm gonna tell you, you can't make it past me." And that was the day I was fired. I was in L.A., they handcuffed me and took me out of the building in front of the sold out house. I didn't resist. They told me I was fired. Actually, Jay Strongbow told me, "Caesar says you're fired." Caesar meant Vince. And they said I was leaving. I said I didn't have to leave, I had the right to leave the matches. So the cops and security guards took me out. You can't resist these people. That's the stupidest thing in the world to resist arrest. I was asked one time if there was such a thing as "resisting illegal arrest." There's no such thing as illegal arrest until you go into court and prove it. But they didn't arrest me, they just took me out back and let me go.

Keller: How did you originally get involved in bounty hunting?

Shults: I was working up here in '85, '86, '87, working all over the United States going to Egypt and the Middle East working independents. And I needed something to make more money. Like I said, I'm stuck with a house in Connecticut that's not cheap, my daughter's in junior high school and I can't just take her out like I used to. So I

started with something that would make me money. So I became a private investigator. I got licensed through the State Police of Connecticut. I was supposed to go after a couple of motorcycle people that skipped bail that nobody wanted to mess with. And I located them and picked them up and brought them in. From that point on, everybody started hearing about me and I started getting more and more calls. Then I started to get more ins with information outlets throughout the United States, skipped-check tracing, how to locate people when they're working, or through drivers records. I learned a lot about the court system and how to do things. So from there on I became known as the most probable bounty hunter to catch somebody if they can't be caught by others. You got a lot of wanna-be's out here. You've got people in Minneapolis and St. Paul that work Minneapolis and St. Paul, just working the locals. But to go to Puerto Rico and track a guy down there, they can't do it.

Keller: What exactly is a bounty hunter? Do they work independently or as part of law enforcement?

Shults: Usually they work independently. All a bounty hunter is, is you're authorized by the bondsman to apprehend the person who skipped bond. You work under a 1972 Supreme Court decision that says we can cross state lines and we can break and enter a person's house for the purpose of arresting a bail jumper. When a bondsman bonds somebody out, he like owns this person until his day in court. If they don't show up in court, they let a person stay out a while hoping the police will pick them up under a different charge or they'll get caught doing something else. When they call me, it costs them money, but I get the job done.

Keller: Now, you mentioned you haven't been following wrestling all that closely the last few years...

Shults: No, I haven't. It's gotten so ridiculous. A guy showed me a tape at his house of that pay-per-view where they had that snake bite Savage. When I saw that kid's face when they had the camera on that kid in the audience, he was just horrified. Can you imagine what dreams these kids are having. They love these role models. My daughter watched Arsenio Hall sitting here on the bed that night. My daughter, when Terry (Bollea, a/k/a Hulk Hogan) would come to the house, she would sleep on the couch and he would take her bedroom. Now she was seven years old when he first started coming over to our house and she would go in and get a toy out of her room and see all these steroids and bottles in his bag. She would go in and ask her mother, "Is Terry sick?" Her mother told her it was just vitamins. She was just seven years old, she couldn't read the labels. Then, in Minneapolis, she was in the seventh grade and she can read this stuff. We're over at his condo in Bloomington and she'd go up to his bedroom with my wife and she'd see all these steroids and she could read them. She didn't know though, exactly what they were. She asked her mom again, "He's still got all these medicine bottles. I remember a long time ago he had them." And her mom said, "Don't worry, they're just vitamins."

You know, you don't want to get into a big conversation about steroids. But "Inside Edition" asked her, "Did you look down upon him because he took steroids?" She said, "No, I didn't look down on him because he stood up in front of America's youth, he's a role model, and he said he didn't take steroids. I cannot believe he would do that. I still don't believe he did that. If I hadn't seen it, I still wouldn't believe it." Because she looked up to him, she loved him. We were so close for so many years. Now he turns his back on us, he never calls, he never says hello. He ignores me, after all I did for him. I'd never ask him for anything. I've always been that way. I've always done things on my own.

He introduced me to them, he supplied them to me, showed me how to use them. I gave him injections hundreds of times. And, you know, why doesn't he come out? That's where I differ. I never had side effects. I would take steroids today if I could get them from a doctor. If he'd give 'em to me, I'd take 'em.

Keller: Why would you take them?

Shults: Because I need to be big. I'm kicking people's doors down and going in their houses. Like I said, I have no side effects. I had none.

Keller: Would you take them at really low levels or take them like Graham did?

Shults: I would never take them like Graham did or Hogan. I would never take them in those amounts. I would take them in small amounts to give me that extra push that I need, that extra metabolism that my body needs to give me that muscle mass. Just enough. I got up to almost 300 pounds, you understand, and that scared me. Then I cut back. When I was in Minneapolis I was taking Deca probably two shots a week. I've seen (wrestlers) take Anavar like M&Ms.

Keller: Do you think these wrestlers realized the risks they were taking and still are?

Shults: He didn't care. These guys have this thing that they don't think. I think it was on Johnny Carson that Hogan said he wanted to be the biggest pro wrestler of all. This guy was huge. It's a shame, because he was a nice guy. Money and greed got the best of him. Today, I wouldn't trade my position with Hogan's.

Keller: What do think the public's perception of Hulk Hogan will be in two years?

Shults: Well, they're gonna finally find the truth. I think he's always going to be a hero for the kids now, but when they grow up, they're going to look back on him and see what kind of physical specimen he is in another three or four years or seven or eight years when he gets off of all steroids and they're going to say he was a liar. He was a joke. You don't respect people who don't come forward and tell you the truth.

Like I said, this is just the tip of the iceberg. You're not talking about social drugs, the cocaine, the heroin, the crack, the uppers, the downers, the sexual preferences. This woman who called your radio show who was worried about her kid, the way he would take the news about Hogan—what if you had a daughter out there who goes to the matches and she ends up in

the bed with one of these wrestlers and these wrestlers travel all over the world and there's no AIDS testing. None whatsoever. I wrote to the athletic commission in 1986 and asked that they start AIDS testing. By 1995 you're going to hear of a lot of wrestlers that have the HIV virus. What if these people spread this disease all over the United States. Just say (Wrestler A) was to be tested for HIV positive, do you realize how many women (Wrestler A) has slept with? Wilt Chamberlain said he was with 25,000 women. Can you imagine if Magic Johnson was with 25,000 women? I mean, the magnitude of this thing is incredible. It's really scary to think about these people having sex with groupies every night who are also sleeping with bands and musicians. It's really scary. And the married wrestlers who are then sleeping with their wives and transferring it...

Keller: What is the promoter's role when it comes to AIDS? Is it the wrestler's responsibility to simply worry about themselves or should the promoter take the initiative because there is such a risk, especially when two guys have open cuts, not to mention steroids needle sharing? Where does the responsibility lie?

Shults: This should be the promoter's responsibility because rasslers are not going to do it themselves. This is the way I feel about the commissions, the wrestlers, and the promoters. There should be a national United States commission. And never tell anyone where you're going to test. And you walk to the dressing room and say, "You, you, you, and you, come with me." You go straight to the bathroom, take the urine or whatever, with no advanced notice. One night they may be in L.A. and the next night in Buffalo. That's the only way they're going to be able to control this steroid abuse, this AIDS, this drug abuse of the wrestlers.

Keller: What about the argument that you're invading the privacy of the wrestlers by testing them, either taking their blood or their urine?

Shults: They're putting themselves in the public eye as role models on national TV. TV is a means of making celebrities. Once you become a celebrity, you should be under different rules. You're not invading the privacy of Terry Bollea. You're not even invading the privacy of Hulk Hogan. You're protecting Hulk Hogan from the people out there from transferring some unknown disease because of the power he possesses over girls and kids. The power that these people have on TV, like Patrick Swayze, he could get any girl he wants. Well, not any girl. But they shouldn't have the same rules as people going to work at the grocery store or the guy running the radio station. He's in the eye of the world. There has gotta be some kind of control. I've seen too much.

Keller: If wrestlers are role models, do you have a problem with Hulk Hogan taking steroids?

Shults: No, I have no problem. No sir.

Keller: As long as he admits he's using them?

Shults: That's right, let him go. If he wants to use them, let him use them. As long as he tells the people. Let me use them, too.

Keller: What about all the high school and junior high kids, then they take these dangerous drugs over time because Hulk Hogan is where he is because he takes steroids? Without them, he would not be in the position he is in to make more money than most people dream about making. He's telling kids to make it big, they have to take steroids. Is it good to promote that message?

Shults: That's the truth. That's it. What can I say. Tell them the truth. To make it big, you have to take steroids. You're not going to make it if you don't.

Keller: What if Kip Frey, the replacement for Jim Herd in WCW, decides, "Okay, we're going to change our policy on promoting and no longer base anything on size and reward only skill and charisma and demote wrestlers who get too big—whether they're on or off steroids—in order to set a good example for the kids." Then you really wouldn't need to use steroids to make it big.

David Shults: They would never last. They would not last in professional wrestling. The TV ratings would get ridiculously low. They couldn't get on TV because the WWF would have these people over 250 pounds looking like Godzilla and King Kong coming to the ring. They're not going to turn the TV into two guys weighing 180 pounds each versus two guys weighing 200 pounds a piece when they can turn channels and see these Road Warrior looking guys.

Keller: Look at a match between Warlord and Hercules or even Greg Valentine and Paul Roma; I think fans, given the choice between Warlord walking down the aisle and even the Road Warrior, or the Rockers or Bobby Eaton or Jushin Liger—these talented, high-flying wrestlers who don't need steroids as part of their gimmicks—I think given the choice, I think fans will choose the more athletic one. For instance, pro basketball and hockey are more popular than bodybuilding, and while there is probably steroid use in hockey and basketball, no one is promoted based on size. If the athletics took over in wrestling and it became like the NBA or NHL, maybe the people would turn to the action where the best wrestlers were—due to proper innovative promotion—finally perceived as the best wrestlers. Am I way off in my thoughts?

Shults: I think you have a dream there. I agree with what you're saying. I wish it would happen. It would be great. It would be great to be able to tell these guys training to be wrestlers, "Hey, you're gonna do great because you're athletically inclined, you can do this, you just look good. You're not too big, you're not too small. You're going to make a lot of money." It won't happen because it just won't draw. The first thing you mentioned was basketball. You don't think these guys take steroids?

Keller: I'm sure many do, but I don't think anyone is using them to the degree that a lot

Mr. T tried to come in the dressing room in L.A., but it was a restricted area, wrestlers only. I told him he couldn't come in. He said he was coming in to see some guys. I said, "No you ain't going nowhere. You're not coming in this dressing room." So his bodyguards stepped up and I said, "Hey, you all ain't coming in, either. Nobody's going past me. I'm gonna tell you, you can't make it past me." And that was the day I was fired.

of professional wrestlers do. I don't think you have announcers going, "Look at those arms on Michael Jordan! Wow! What an athlete!"

Shults: That's right, but there's different kinds of steroids. Like Ben Johnson, the Canadian runner who all the blame was thrown on in the Olympics. He took what it took to make his body the best that it could be. He used artificial hormones to give him that extra little thing to reach. If everyone had to use that to reach their potential and if they wanted to be the best they could be, I think they should be able to use any means given to them to be that way. That's where Billy and I disagree. You can't show me any evidence where steroids have caused anything for anybody yet. They did no harm to me whatsoever. I'm telling ya', I would take them today.

I don't think steroids will ever be under control unless they have a commission—not a state commission—but a national commission. Money buys things. But have a United States Athletic Commission that does nothing but test professional athletes. If they're going to travel and be on television, they should be licensed and checked randomly. Anyone, in fact, should be tested—not just athletes—that goes on TV and makes money from (the public's admiration of their abilities)...

I mean, this is going to be a problem if no one does anything about it. Somebody—and I'm serious when I say this—somebody needs to have a meeting with the president of the United States and explain the problem. These people are in every kids' store you go to. In every kids' store there are these Hulk Hogan dolls and American Gladiators. Come one, those people aren't on steroids? Some of those women are bigger than the guys. The Gladiators are getting beat. Going

Jerry Lawler runs it the way he wants to run it. He couldn't make it anywhere else and that's just the plain fact. I don't know if he even took aspirin, he was such a clean guy when I knew him and we used to travel together. He never had to because he had the say.

back to what you said about WCW. They're starting to tour the states and they're getting these people who aren't big, mean, and muscular, but are in great shape and beating these huge Gladiators because they're too fast for them. This "Grudge Match" show with Jesse the Body, mark my words, you heard this from "Dr. D" David Shults: "Grudge Match" will be travelling from town to town. Within the next six months I would announce a national tour and ask people to write in their grudges with details and tell them they could settle their feud at Met Center or their local arena.

Keller: Imagine the friends and family that would go out to see it.

Shults: That's right. It's a good thing they've got going there. It's harmless, pouring garbage all over each other. If they don't tour, they should. I think when you talk to Jesse, tell him I thought that.

Back to WCW. If they decided to go completely steroid free, let them do it, but they should demand they get equal air time on stations that the WWF is on. If one (goes steroid-free), then the other will have to do it.

Keller: That's a good idea. WCW could go to stations and say, "Hey if you're not going to broadcast us or give us a chance because we're steroid free, what does that say about your station?"

Shults: That's absolutely right. That's the way it should be done. WCW is going to get people like me to call them and say, "Listen, I'd like to come back to wrestling. I still have a lot of years left." I was good when I was wrestling. I did my job too good; some people believed me too good. I wouldn't mind going back into it. But to have stayed with McMahon I would have had to abuse steroids like Hulk Hogan did or Billy (Graham) did. Maybe it was a blessing in disguise that I was fired.

Keller: So you would be interested in getting back into wrestling?

Shults: If it was that way, I wouldn't mind at all because I wouldn't have any pressure of dealing with those guys. I work out all the time, I played like five racketball games this morning. But to have to wrestle these guys the way they are using steroids today, I couldn't compare.

Keller: If you got back into it, would you try to get at least some steroids through the black market to gain a competitive edge?

Shults: No, no. I could get steroids easy through the black market, but I don't use nothing that doesn't come from a doctor. If a doctor gives me something, fine. I can go out here and buy something someone says is steroids, but it's probably one-tenth steroids, so you're going to be shooting nine-tenths cottonseed oil or olive oil into your muscles. That ain't meant to be. If you have high school kids buying this fake stuff and injecting it, they're going to see some improvements and keep buying it because they don't know what the real stuff is like.

Keller: Were there a lot of steroids around wrestling when you first started in the business, just not in as heavy doses?

Shults: When I got in wrestling, you never heard of steroids. Tommy Gilbert, Jerry Lawler, Jack Brisco, Dory Funk Jr., there was no steroid talk. You still never see steroid people go to Memphis and stay a long time because they're a threat to him. He told me one time because I lived there and it was my hometown, "I ain't gonna let anybody interfere with me. I don't want you around me."

Keller: Do you believe Jerry Lawler has been good for the Memphis territory, or do you believe it would have been better if he had moved on and not, for lack of a better word, monopolized the top position in that territory for the last couple decades?

Shults: Well, he couldn't make it anywhere else because he's not big enough and he didn't take steroids. Lawler, he runs it the way he wants to run it. He couldn't make it anywhere else and that's just the plain fact. I don't know if he even took aspirin, he was such a clean guy when I knew him and we used to travel together. He never had to because he had the say.

Keller: What is your attitude on the open communication between many wrestlers and the press these days, such as this interview and Billy Graham's interview with the *Observer*, and the newsletter philosophy?

Shults: I think it's great that it's starting to come out. You have to be very athletically inclined to be a wrestler. When I got into the business, you had to be tough. Now they will let anyone and their brother into wrestling. If you've got a kid out here and he's got one eye in the middle of his head, if you hide him from when he's 12 to when he's 22, you'll make a million dollars in pro wrestling in ten years because he's a freak. It's not wrestling, it's entertainment. It's always been entertainment, but it's more of a controlled entertainment than it was back then. If Verne Gagne went in the ring and his opponent didn't want to do right, he'd stretch you across the ring. He could do it. That's the way I was and promoters used me that way. Then McMahon comes along and he didn't care. Hogan and I would get done fighting each other in Los Angeles and then meet Vince in front of the building, get in a limo, and drive to the airport. We'd walk out of the same building, he didn't care.

TORCH SIDEBAR

REFLECTIONS ON TORCH TALKS

Scorpio: With all of the talk of collective bargaining in the past few months, it's interesting to note that Scorpio felt he was bullied and rushed into signing his original WCW contract... Bill Watts lost his job through a combination of perceived incompetence and racial comments he made in a "Torch Talk" in a TORCH Annual. Scorpio acknowledges Watts's view on race, yet at the same time said it was other older wrestlers who thought Watts was pushing him and Ron Simmons too fast... Scorpio is one of several wrestlers who have done "Torch Talks" over the years to talk about Flair's tendency to say to your face what he thinks you want to hear, but then turn around and say something completely different to someone else behind your back... Back when Scorpio was in WCW, one of the big complaints about Bischoff already was that he relied too much on advice from biased, selfish wrestlers. At the time Scorpio thought Bischoff was listening too much to Ric Flair. In later years it would be Hulk Hogan and Kevin Nash who would have Bischoff's ear. One theme of "Torch Talks" with WCW wrestlers during the Bischoff Administration is that he had "big ideas" about the industry, but when it got down to day-to-day wrestler and storyline-related decisions, he relied on others to make up for his shortcomings—often with negative results... Hearing Scorpio recount the Sid-Arn Anderson hotel fight makes it all the more odd that Sid and Arn shook hands on the July 28, 1999 Nitro. There is still heat there. It's clear from Scorpio's eyewitness account that the incident was a stupid, drunken disagreement that could have been much worse. Could it happen again?...

Eddie Sharkey: Eddie was one of the first "Torch Talks." Any time I've interviewed him, he's liberal with praise for most people, so when he says something bad about somebody, it's usually a strong indication he has an extremely low opinion of them. In his comment about Jesse Ventura, he snuck in a sense of disappointment that Ventura never mentions his name as helping train him...

Mike Shaw: The names in WCW may have been different back in 1990-'91, but the story was the same. Frustration with bookers and management poorly utilizing talent and being inconsistent with pushes. Frustration with older names hoarding pushes from the younger wrestlers... Shaw would go on to wrestle briefly as Bastion Booger in the WWF. After his late-'80s series of matches against Owen Hart, he was considered one of the better big-man workers in the world. WCW never took advantage of that and the WWF never gave him a second-chance. He's worked independent matches and trained wrestlers in recent years...

David Shults: This 1991 interview was among the first, if not the first, where a wrestler close to Hulk Hogan openly talked about his steroid use. Shults was around Hogan in the AWA and the WWF. He was, undoubtedly, considered a loose cannon. His time to sell a book on pro wrestling—something he said he was writing at the time of the interview—may be now during wrestling's boom period. His name, though, hasn't surfaced in several years...

DAVEY BOY SMITH

The following is a "Torch Talk" interview with "British Bulldog" Davey Boy Smith conducted Jan. 5, 1993. Smith talks about his early days in wrestling, an injury he suffered before SummerSlam, his feelings concerning Vince McMahon, Hulk Hogan, Bret Hart, Dynamite Kid, SummerSlam '92, steroids, and more.

Keller: At what point in your life did you first become interested in being a pro wrestler?

Smith: It was when I was about 12. Dynamite Kid was going to wrestle and my mom put me in the same wrestling school as him. I decided from 12 years of age I wanted to be in wrestling.

Keller: Your mom encouraged you to become a pro wrestler?

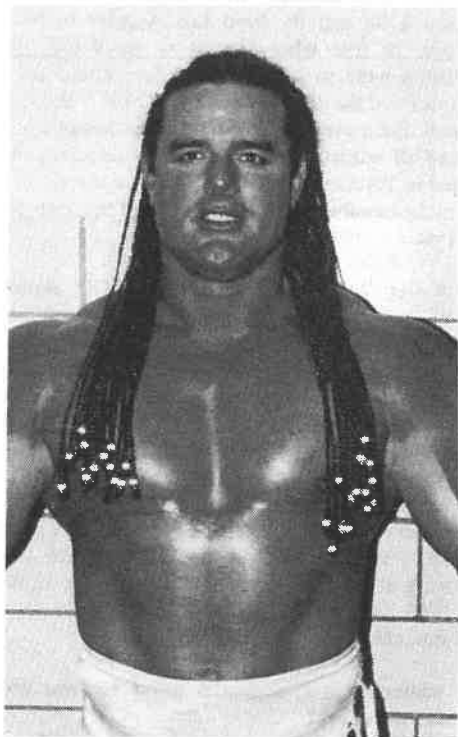
Smith: Yes. Both my mom and my dad. My mom was the one who got me more into it. She wanted me to do something with my life. She didn't want me to be like a lot of my friends just on the streets of England.

Keller: Is it true that you first wrestled professionally at age 15?

Smith: Yes, in 1978. I had my first match in Birmingham, England. I wrestled there about two-and-a-half years. Then I went to Canada at 17 1/2 years old.

Keller: Did your mother want you to move at that young age?

Smith: She didn't want me to move, but Dynamite Kid had already gone to Canada and was already a big success. I just wanted to follow in his footsteps and see what I could do in Canada.



British Bulldog

Keller: What were some of your earliest memories? At 15, you were probably in the ring with people at least twice your age.

Smith: Yes. I wrestled Nick McManus and Big Daddy was my tag team partner. It was a big deal because I was the youngest wrestler ever to be on the circuit in England.

Keller: Did they publicize your age?

Smith: Yes.

Keller: And you were only 175 pounds at the time?

Smith: No, then I was like 140.

Keller: Did people tell you that you were too small to wrestle?

Smith: Yes, but there were different weights in England, like light-weights, bantam-weights, and light-heavyweights. Not like in the States where everyone is considered a heavyweight.

Keller: Was it a shock to move from England to Canada at such a young age?

Smith: Yeah, it was different. Being at such a young age and leaving school, going straight to Canada, it was pretty wild. Being around people you never met before and being around big cities and big cars and living life in the fast-lane, it was pretty different. It took some getting used to.

Keller: When you look back at your days in Calgary, what are some of your fondest memories?

Smith: It was like a different circuit altogether. There were even different rules. In England, when you knock someone down, you have to give them the count of ten to get up. In Calgary, the fans would yell at me because I would knock a guy down and then back off. I'm looking at the people saying like, "What are you talking about? I have to back off." Dynamite told me what to do. In Calgary I had to wrestle bigger guys, like David Shults and Bad News Allen. It was different.

Keller: What were some of the negatives? Did you ever feel bad that you missed out on the traditional teenage years because at 15 you were already wrestling professionally?

Smith: I see myself as being fortunate. But I worked for everything I did. It's not like I just fell into wrestling and went to Canada. I worked from 12 to 15, that's three years right there training hard. Even though I was small, I have trained all of my life more or less. I didn't miss much. I would have just been out playing with my friends out on the streets maybe up to no good. Working all day when I was off school, the trainer's reward to me was teaching me to wrestle and I would help him with some of his jobs.

Keller: At a young age did you foresee yourself becoming as successful internationally as you have become?

Smith: No. Not at all. My mom said that I would go places. I was always a good wrestler. My dad said I was going to go places. But nobody knew that I would be leaving England almost for good. I've been away from England for almost 13 years. I've just gone back on tours and never really gone back to live there. My mom just left the other day;

she was here to see me for a couple of weeks.

Keller: Do you have any other brothers or sisters?

Smith: I have one brother and two sisters.

Keller: Were they ever interested in the wrestling business or have they chosen more traditional jobs in England?

Smith: They've stayed in England with traditional jobs. I tried to get my older brother into it, but he just didn't have the interest. If you don't have the interest, there's no reason to pursue it.

Keller: You say at age 12 you became interested in becoming a wrestler? What originally got you interested in it?

Smith: Well, when I was 11 I was doing amateur wrestling. Then Dynamite just got into the professional ranks. I was watching on TV and said, "Wow, I'd like to do that." So then my mom talked to the trainer and he said I was a bit young, but if I helped him around his house, he would give it a whirl and teach me to work.

Keller: Besides wrestling style, was there culturally a shock moving to Canada at 17?

Smith: Yes. I don't know what I would have done if Dynamite wasn't around. He was the only person I knew. I lived with him about two weeks and then moved in with Bret Hart. I lived with Bret for about three years.

Keller: Was Bret still living at home with Stu?

Smith: Yes. In my first two weeks of being in Canada, that's where I met my wife. I was like, wow, this Canada is really different. A different style of wrestling, the food was different. I figured to go back to England and wrestle in England, but then I met Diana (Hart, Bret's sister). She was only 15, 16. Stu wasn't too pleased at the time, but we were just good friends. She helped me out a lot, to restaurants where I could eat like I ate in England, fish and chips and that, you know? She helped me that way and then we started going out. Then we got married in 1984 when I was 21 or 22.

Keller: At what point did you get interested in going to Japan with Dynamite Kid?

Smith: He had already been there a couple of times. I was still not ready for Japan yet. So I just stayed in Canada for another year-and-a-half, two years. Finally I got my foot in the door with Inoki. They came over to do a tour in Canada. They wanted a "Canada vs. Japan" type of deal and they wanted to do TV tapings in Calgary. They put me against a couple of Japanese boys and they liked me. They booked me on one show and then I started going all the time, almost full-time on every-other tour. I think McMahon saw tapes of us there.

Keller: Both you and Dynamite impressed the Japanese with innovative moves the Japanese had never seen before. Did you and Dynamite work hard at coming up with new moves or did you just fall into doing them almost by accident?

Smith: No, we got together and thought about everything. What about if you were to run at me

Well, when I was 11 I was doing amateur wrestling. Then Dynamite Kid just got into the professional ranks. I was watching on TV and said, "Wow, I'd like to do that." So then my mom talked to the trainer and he said I was a bit young, but if I helped him around his house, he would give it a whirl and teach me to work. I don't know what I would have done if Dynamite wasn't around. He was the only person I knew. I lived with him about two weeks and then moved in with Bret Hart. I lived with Bret for about three years.

and I were to pick you up and throw you onto a guy with a headbutt. If I grabbed someone on my shoulders like a fireman's carry and you, from the top turnbuckle, jumped on the guy onto the other guy. Things like that, double dropkicks from the top rope. The Japanese had never seen that before. They still haven't because nobody else ever does that. Nobody can do it. It's really hard to do because of the timing.

Keller: There comes a time in a lot of wrestlers careers when they decide to give up some speed and agility in exchange for more size. What prompted you to make the move toward muscle and did you lose some speed when you gained weight?

Smith: I slowed down a little bit. I've heard that question a lot. I didn't slow down as much as the other wrestlers slowed down. When Dynamite and I left the WWF the first time after four years, there were a lot of guys looking at us saying, "Boy, those guys are unbelievable. They can do a lot of stuff we can't do." So we didn't really fit in at first. There were some that were jealous. When we left, the wrestling kind of changed again. We changed it when we were there. We sped things up when we were there. When we left, it slowed down again. It went to bigger guys like Barbarian and Warlord. So I looked at those guys and said to myself, "What if I bulk up and do the same things?" So I went in the gym and trained for two years when I was off from the WWF and back and forth from Japan. I gained about 30 pounds and then was ready to go back to the WWF. I did the same stuff at the same size and wanted to do

the same thing, but I couldn't against the guys I was wrestling. They couldn't do it. It wasn't me. The other wrestlers changed. Not a lot of people could do the high-flying stuff. You could see some of that at SummerSlam.

Keller: I understand you and Bret Hart were ribbing each other before the card. Hart joked that he was going to take you the full 60 minutes and wear you out.

Smith: Yeah, that was the big thing.

Keller: I heard you responded by trying to get into better cardiovascular shape.

Smith: I was in great shape six-and-a-half weeks before the match and then I got injured. I powerslammed Mike Sharpe and pulled him in. I felt a sharp pain in my knee. It didn't bother me. I went to bed that night and woke up the next morning. I went to get out of bed and I was rooming with Owen (Hart) and I noticed my knee was really sore. So I got up and wanted to walk it off. But I had a cut on my knee and I didn't know it. As the day went on my knee got bigger and bigger and more painful. When I got to the TV tapings, I was upstairs eating. I tried to get downstairs and I couldn't walk. I was like crawling.

They took me to the hospital and took X-rays. They thought I pulled a hamstring, but I told them it didn't feel like a hamstring. They couldn't find anything, so they put me in a leg brace. So I told Vince I couldn't do anything right now. I was in so much pain I couldn't even walk. I was on crutches. Vince put me in a limousine and took me to the airport. He told me to go home and don't talk to anyone. He said, "I don't want anyone knowing you're injured." So I went home. My wife wasn't around. She was up in Calgary seeing her parents. I figured I would just take some pain killers and rest it. The next day it got worse. Finally, my temperature was so high, I could barely move. I was sweating and had a icebag on my head and on my leg. (Editor's Note: Readers easily grossed-out might choose to skip the next ten lines.) They said there was something more wrong, so they sent me to a specialist. Right away he looked at my knee and said I had an infection. It's gangrene of the knee or something. He stuck a needle in my knee and nothing would come out. He sent me home and put me on some antibiotics. The next day I went to go in the toilet. I went to sit down and when I bent down, I tried to force my leg to close and when I did, my skin ripped on my knee and it was eating my knee away. This green and yellow sh— started coming out of my knee.

I called the doctor out and he told me I had the worst staff infection I could. It was eating my knee away. I didn't know what he meant. He said if I hadn't come to him within another couple days to be put on the right antibiotics, I might have lost my leg or died. He said this stuff goes through you in 48 or 60 hours. It was really bad. I was on my back for three weeks. Vince would call and ask me how I was doing. I would say, "Oh, I'm doing good." Meanwhile, I was lying on the bed in pain. I didn't want to miss my shot. So I went to England two weeks before the show. Vince called me and I told him I was about 90 percent. I was nowhere near that, more like 50

percent. I was really scared when I went in the ring, wondering if my knee would hold up. After the match, I couldn't move. I was in a daze. I didn't know where I was. I said to my wife, "Did everything go all right." I had a terrible loss. It was due to all of the antibiotics.

Keller: Are you happy with your match at SummerSlam against Bret Hart?

Smith: Oh, yeah. Wow. I hadn't wrestled in seven weeks. He wanted me to go work around Florida right before SummerSlam to prepare. But I said no because I didn't want to go blow my knee again. I didn't want to chance it.

Keller: Was there something special working in front of a crowd that large in your home country?

Smith: I worked at the Pontiac Silverdome. But it's not the same as in England walking in front of 80,000 English fans. I was at the Queen Memorial Concert and we drew more people than them.

Keller: Looking back on when you first entered the WWF, did your attitude change about wrestling? You mentioned before that WWF wrestlers then couldn't keep up with you and Dynamite Kid.

Smith: The scheduling was not bad then. It was still bad as far as travelling. I came in and wanted to do all of my fancy stuff, so I stuck to the basics and when the time comes to do what I know best I'll throw it in the rest of my match. I wrestled Bret in Binghamton and Vince said, "Wow." I told him that was nothing compared to what we could do. My attitude changed a little bit. I figured I could do what I could do if I wanted to do it.

Keller: What were the main differences working for the WWF compared to Canada and Japan?

Smith: There were a lot bigger crowds in the WWF. The schedule was rougher. We would drive a lot and fly from Los Angeles to New York. At first when I went to the WWF, the crowds were so easy to work for. You'd do a suplex and the crowd would react. Now Vince has given them everything. You can cut somebody's head off and fans don't react. That's especially the case in Toronto and that area. They're brutal. You can do a double-back somersault and not even get a reaction out of them.

Keller: That seems to be different in Japan. The fans are given everything all the time, but they still react.

Smith: The fans appreciate it as opposed to the good ol' "boring" chant. And in Japan the schedule is so easy. You get up in the morning, eat breakfast, go for a drive, eat lunch, work out, you're match is at six o'clock and you're back at the hotel and you eat at eight o'clock. It's so easy, it's too easy, it's unbelievable. All you have to do is give them 15 minutes of your time each day. That's all. You're whole day is your day. In the WWF, you're on a plane, then you gotta get a room, check yourself in, and all of that.

Keller: Is that a mental grind for you and most wrestlers?

Smith: Yes. It was a grind the four years I was

with Dynamite. I was carrying the dog around. It was six weeks on with maybe a week off. Vince's schedule now is ten days on, three days off. I asked Vince, what am I supposed to do with three days off? The first day you're travelling to get home. You get home at four o'clock. Then you have two days off, but you have to get ready to go back on the road on the third day. I think a lot of wrestlers were dragged down. I am pretty tough when it comes to that. It takes a lot before it wears me down or bothers me.

Keller: Who was able to keep up with you in the ring?

Smith: I thought Warlord kept up with me well for a big guy. Vince, when it came out on tape, cut it to pieces. I was really mad when I went to the video store to rent it for my son. We locked up, went to a highspot, and then all of a sudden right to the finish. Bret Hart of course. The referee during the first fifteen minutes of our match told us, "Go home." But I said, "No way." Bret and Jim Neidhart were the best. They were great. Valentine and Beefcake were excellent, too. We had a couple excellent matches with the Funks, too. That was when we were on the road every single day, non-stop, six or seven weeks without a day off, so Terry Funk quit. I look back and say, "How did I do that?"

Keller: Do you feel proud that there are wrestlers today who look at your old matches teaming with Dynamite Kid and pattern themselves after the Bulldogs?

Smith: Yes, it's flattering they want to be like us. It's great. I wish we could get back together and do all the same stuff we used to do.

Keller: What's the latest you've heard on Dynamite Kid?

Smith: I just talked to Jimmy Snuka yesterday who said he heard that Dynamite was doing some work in England.

Keller: Do you keep in touch with him at all?

Smith: No, not really. My parents talk to him every once in a while over there. I haven't talked to him in a long time, not since we left Calgary, more or less.

Keller: Did you grow apart from each other?

Smith: There is tension there, but one day we might bury the hatchet.

Keller: Has your attitude changed toward wrestling as far as priorities between family and career?

Smith: You're on the road all of the time. I made better money with Dynamite than when I came back the second time. I asked myself, "What am I doing? I'm flying back and forth all over the Untied States and I'm not with my wife and kids and I'm making half the money I was making before." If you factor in Europe, Vince is drawing what he was then and he's got pay-per-view. The more money he makes, the less he's paying me. So I said it had to stop.

Keller: What is your fondest memory from your days in the WWF?

Smith: I had a really good time wrestling

Valentine and Beefcake in Chicago during Wrestlemania II when we had the belts. Me and Beefcake sit down sometimes and watch in amazement. We went boom, boom, boom, boom for fifteen minutes nonstop. I've had some classics with Jim and Bret.

Keller: It's a credit to Valentine that you and Dynamite were able to have matches as good as you did because Beefcake was pretty limited.

Smith: Yeah. Beefcake was limited, but what he could do looked impressive, I thought. When I went in the ring, I could do something with him, he could follow me through. He never forgot things.

Keller: Do a lot of wrestlers forget things as they go through the match.

Smith: Yeah. "Ohh, I forgot. Sorry," they say.

Keller: Do you have a worst memory from your days in the WWF?

Smith: I was really pissed off when I lost the Intercontinental belt. I was told one thing and something else happened.

Keller: Is it your experience that often Vince McMahon promised one thing and did another?

Smith: I find that to be absolutely true, without a doubt. I'm a living witness to that. I win the belt in England. I'm told there are big plans. I get back to the States and I'm told, "You're big in England, but you're not worth anything here."

Keller: Did McMahon talk in a demeaning way a lot or sometimes talk positively?

Smith: Yes. He said, "You're a hell of a worker. You're a good worker. You're still going to be British Bulldog without the belt." I said, "The belt doesn't mean anything to me. I was promised that I was going to keep it and make a lot of money with it." I even asked him at TV if he was going to take the belt off of me. He said no, that after the show in England, he was going all the way with me. The next TV he took it off of me. He said, "Well, things have a way of changing." I just finally got my release, but he said I can't use the British Bulldog name. I trademarked it in 1985 and have my lawyer on him. He said he spent so much money establishing the name, but you can call anyone British Bulldog, but if they can't back up the name in the ring to please the people and give the people their money's worth, nobody's gonna watch them. He didn't establish me. He got me over on TV. But if it wasn't for my talent, he wouldn't have me. It was a mutual agreement that I would leave and have full release. He said, "You've known me long enough to know I'd never hold you to your contract. And you're free to go." Then he sent me a letter saying I can't use the name British Bulldog because of the expense put into it and the merchandise and videos. So my lawyer sent him a letter and said, "No, it's the other way around. You can't use me anymore on videotapes and merchandise." My real name on my birth certificate was Davey Boy Smith. My mom put that down when you were supposed to put male or female, and she wrote boy so my birth certificate says, "Davey Boy Smith." In 1985

when I was working for McMahon I told Dynamite that we ought to trademark our name. He said, "Naw, I'm gonna pay lawyers to trademark my name. It's my name. No one's going to take my name. It's been my name since I was 13 years old." I went ahead and trademarked British Bulldog and I own Dynamite Kid's name, too, so I own his name. I'm going to continue doing independents as British Bulldog. I have been for 15 years. I have the papers in England backing me, too. For him to say I can't use "British Bulldog," is like saying I can't represent my country.

Keller: What are your personal thoughts on Hulk Hogan as a person and as a wrestler?

Smith: As a wrestler, he's a good wrestler. As a person, I think he's great. He's always been good to me. Every time I've been with him, I've always had a great time. He's straight forward. He doesn't talk about you behind your back. I think he's a great guy. I can't fault him in any way. He's done more for McMahon than McMahon ever did for him. He put wrestling back on the map as far as popularity goes for the people. He can do a lot of things in the ring. As far as drawing crowds, McMahon tried it with a couple guys and replacing Hogan didn't work.

Keller: Do you agree that Hogan made some mistakes along the way handling the bad publicity, such as his appearance on the Arsenio Hall Show talking about his steroid use?

Smith: Well, we've all done that. He was just trying to defend himself. Look at Hulk Hogan. In the kids' eyes, he's a hero. He's never done anything to hurt anyone, yet he's got all these people on his back. People like Billy Graham, he helped when he came back. Then he turned around on him for no reason. If anyone had a beef it was with McMahon, but instead they hit McMahon and Hogan and Hogan didn't have anything to do with it. He was the scapegoat. When Larry King Live was on, me and the Nasty Boys back in Hawaii were watching this getting a kick out of it, you know, but then Bruno Sammartino says my name on TV. What have I ever done to him? His son was on steroids for ten years, the little blimp, don't bring me into it. He said me, Barbarian, Warlord. I'm just glad people know me as the Bulldog. Even if they do know me as Smith, I don't care.

Keller: How bad was steroid use a couple years ago in the WWF? Was 80 or 90 percent a fair assessment?

Smith: The reason people were using them wasn't as much to get big as it was to keep them fit on the road and ready to work out because you get so burned out on McMahon's schedule. It's just not for a natural human being. Mike Tyson going in the ring and boxing every night or football players playing every night is the equivalent. You just can't do it. You get injured and you still have to get in the ring the next night or you don't get paid.

Keller: Some doctors say building up your muscles through steroid use to an excessive level would make you more susceptible to

tendon injuries or muscle tears.

Smith: Well, I've torn my pecks a couple of times. Like Scott Steiner, if you clothesline someone and you tear your bicep, you tear your bicep. With Scott, I think he flew over the top rope and his arm caught. With a smaller arm he might not have caught the rope.

Keller: Did you experience any mood swings from using steroid?

Smith: It never bothered me. I think it depends on the dosage, too.

Keller: Did you feel comfortable with your steroid use?

Smith: I never felt I abused them. I was under a doctor's care. I got them on a prescription and picked them up from the pharmacy. I never really did the black market because you didn't know what you were doing.

Keller: Did you stop when McMahon began testing?

Smith: Last January around the Rumble is when he got serious. Then we had to get off. There was no choice. I trained heavy all of my life, so I gained a lot of quality muscle, so when I got off the steroids, I shrank a little bit. But when I lost some weight, I got smoother looking. I wasn't as defined. I tried the Jim Brunzell drops for gaining weight, I tried the IcoPro, and I tried the cybernetics. My body's at the stage now where when I'm off them, I'm 255 and when I go on them, I'm 270, so what's 15 pounds. I'm big enough as it is, I don't need to gain more weight.

Keller: What about Human Growth Hormone?

Smith: No, I've never touched that shit. I've never seen anyone admit to taking that. I know professional bodybuilders take it, but I heard you have to take steroids in order for it to work.

Keller: Do you think steroids should be legal?

Smith: Yeah. They have it in the same class as marijuana and cocaine and I think that's a bunch of bullsh—. You can't overdose on steroids.

Keller: Do you see Superstar Graham and think, "Geez, that might be me some day?"

Smith: No, I think he's sick with something. For him to need two hip replacements when he was never a big bump taker, I don't know what the deal is with him.

Keller: So you're not concerned about health problems at all?

Smith: No, I've known people who have taken steroids for years and never had health problems. They still now are competing in Mr. Universe and Mr. Britain and stuff. I train with these people and they are my friends. They are a perfect example of people who can use them and not abuse them.

Keller: Did you ever see mood swings?

Smith: I did, but I think it was kind of a big work. "I took this and I'm mean now." Get a grip on yourself, idiot, if you know what I mean.

Keller: Did you associate much with Randy Savage when you were in the WWF?

Smith: Randy has done pretty well in the WWF with a good, long run. He was helpful, too, behind the scenes in giving out advice. You gotta get to know him. I roomed with him.

Keller: Did you deal much with Ultimate Warrior?

Smith: I roomed with him for a year. I showed him the ropes, like where to stay, where to eat, where to train. He called me up the other day. He's doing pretty good. He's in Boston wrestling tomorrow night.

Keller: What is your impression of Pat Patterson?

Smith: He was always great with me. I never had any problems with Pat. He was always straight forward with me and helpful in the office. I called him up and talked to him on the phone. He called me the other day and said he was playing golf in Florida and told me to come and see him. A lot of people have different opinions of him. At the end of my stay in the WWF when I was getting pissed off, he tried to calm me down. "You're still going to be used the same. You're still going to be British Bulldog," he said. "No I'm not," I said. But I always believed Pat. I never believed Vince.

Keller: What about Ric Flair?

Smith: Yes, he was great. I had some good matches with him in England.

Keller: Who were you closest to behind the scenes?

Smith: Warlord. I would trust him with my life. He has always been great with me. Hawk was good, too. Hawk and Animal. Warlord would always call up and tell me if someone said something about me. He's always defended me and I've always defended him. He's one of the nicest, most straight-forward people I've met. He wouldn't say boo to a goose, but if you get him pissed off, oooh. But it takes a lot for him to get mad. He's a hell of a guy. I call him all the time. We talk all the time. I want to do an independent shot against him. I've got some in Denver against him.

Keller: Who in the WWF did you admire the least? Vince McMahon?

Smith: There were some other guys. I always got along with Vince, don't get me wrong. He brought me in and put me in a good position. You can't put someone in a good position and have it work unless they can back it up in the ring. But in the end I was disappointed with all of the false promises. I worked hard to get back in the ring at SummerSlam and for him to turn around and have me drop the belt to Shawn, it wasn't right. I don't mind doing that in general, don't get me wrong. But when you've been promised that you would keep the belt for a while and have a good run and make some money, especially in England, and then for them to take it away from you.

Keller: Was that the main reason you left the WWF? I know a newspaper in England reported that you were upset with money?

Smith: I was asked to carry the flag for Lennox Lewis for that fight. I said yeah. They asked me

on it, I didn't ask them. Then all of a sudden they told me I had to work that day and couldn't do it. They cancelled it, but still didn't book me for a match, so I was pretty pissed about that. I had this TV show I was supposed to do in England and they sent somebody else in my place. Then they had me do this rap record— me along with Randy, and Bret. They said they were going to send me to do p.r. work in England and at the last minute they pulled me out of that and sent Randy instead. It was like they were trying to keep me out of England. Maybe I was getting too strong there or too powerful. Then they told me I was dropping the belt. So I decided I had better get out before they started jobbing me out on TV. I wasn't doing anything on TV. I wouldn't do no jobs. So I was out of there, see ya'. I was just unhappy. I saw my interview sheet where I was working with Tatanka, Doink, Bam Bam Bigelow, and Bob Backlund. I said to Vince, "What is this?" Just because I had a good match with Hart doesn't mean I'll have a good match with these guys. Don't get me wrong, they're good wrestlers, but it was going to be job, job, job. I knew I wasn't going over Bam Bam. They had big plans for Doink, Howdy Doody, and Tatanka, too. I talked to Vince. He knew I was unhappy. I asked him if I was unhappy and wanted my release, if he would give me a release. He called me back and said, "If you still feel the same way and want to go to Japan, England, and all that, if the grass is greener on the other side, go ahead."

Keller: Were the number figures reported in the paper somewhat accurate?

Smith: No, I didn't discuss any figures with them. They just made them up. I never mentioned a figure. I told them, "I can't discuss figures with any of them, it's my private life." My mom called me two days later and she told me they printed figures in the newspapers and I just laughed when she told me the figures. They still ask me and I never will. What Macho Man made, or Bossman made, or Bret "The Hitman" Hart, they're all different people. I don't have a clue what those guys make and it's none of my business. So there's no way I gave them a figure.

Keller: Did you get paid proportionately throughout your stay in the WWF compared to the number of people drawn to the arena and the merchandise sold?

Smith: No. It got worse. It got so bad, it was brutal. I just got my last merchandise check, I laughed. It was a quarter of the one I got before that one. And this time I had my dolls, new t-shirts, lunch boxes, shoes, bags, pajamas, and everything in England. Let's be fair. I made four times the money last time that I got this time. I should have gotten twice as much this time as last time because of my dolls.

Keller: Is there any way for a wrestler to keep track of the accuracy or is a wrestler at the mercy of trusting of McMahon?

Smith: I don't know and right now, I told my wife today, I don't really care. Just give me my name and let me get out of this miserable situation.

Keller: What are your future plans?

Smith: WCW called me in November and I told them what Vince was doing with my name. I told them I got a full release. I am going to Puerto Rico for three days this weekend and meeting with WCW tomorrow with WCW brass next week.

Keller: Would you consider returning to the WWF?

Smith: Why would anyone want to go from WCW to the WWF? These guys had contracts with WCW. I know for a fact Flair wasn't making the kind of money he made with WCW in the WWF. I know the Steiners aren't making the money they made in WCW. The same with Luger. Why the hell would anyone want to go over there?

Keller: Maybe some wrestlers think they are going to the number one group and will receive more fame.

Smith: F— the fame, get the money. Geez, I know from experience. I've been in the WWF. I know what kind of money Flair made. I know Luger is going to have a shock and that the Steiners are going to have a shock. The payoffs are brutal. It's too bad they have to go over there to find that out.

Keller: A lot of them feel they will get more respect from management in the WWF than in WCW, and that is apparently important to many wrestlers, too.

Smith: Yes, it sure is. What really got me mad was the WBF thing. Here was McMahon getting this company going, spending millions of dollars on bodybuilding. And then he gives them contracts, like Gary Stridem 500 grand, Lou Ferigno comes in for 500,000 dollars. Hey, we're the wrestlers, the ones who are putting asses in the seats, we're the ones who are drawing all the money. Vince has all of that money and he can't give us contracts but he can give contracts to bodybuilders. He's a mark for bodybuilding. I'm telling you he's a true mark for bodybuilders. Anyone who would give a bodybuilder 300 grand who can't draw flies on shit, it's like why would you keep these guys with a health plan and all that while the wrestlers are breaking their backs and they don't make a quarter of what these bodybuilders make.

Keller: Are you interested in returning to Japan?

Smith: I return to Japan for Baba's All Japan in March.

Keller: Do you want to do that regularly?

Smith: It depends on what WCW wants from me, but I'm not going to do anything to jeopardize myself in Japan. I've never met Bill Watts or talked to him in my life.

Keller: What are your interests outside of wrestling?

Smith: Just weight-training. I take my kids out and play with my kids. Play Nintendo with my son. Go jet-skiing and horseback riding. Plus, just relaxing at home.

Keller: Tell me about your family?

Smith: I have two kids, Harry and Georgia. Harry's 7, Georgia's 5. She just told me, I'm not 5, I'm 4.

Keller: Did you name him Harry because of the royal family?

Smith: My wife's mom's father was named Harry, too.

Keller: Would you ever like to see your kids get involved in wrestling?

Smith: Harry knows every wrestling move inside and out. He knows every wrestler, their weight, where they're from, their finishing move. He knows everything about wrestling. I've got pictures of him playing with dolls since he was 2 years old. He will play with them inside the refrigerator like a cage match. He's got so many dolls, my whole house is full of wrestling dolls.

Keller: Would you discourage him from entering wrestling?

Smith: No. He's a big kid, too. He looks like he's 9 years old. He's tall and he's really big.

Keller: Do his friends know that the British Bulldog is his dad?

Smith: They all know. I go to school and pick him up sometimes on my Harley.

Keller: How about a piece of advice you might give to a young wrestler just beginning his wrestling career?

Smith: Make sure that for whatever they charge you (for wrestling school), two or three grand, that you get it in a contract. There are so many people that are ripping off kids in these wrestling camps. Make sure you get taught well and not abused when you're being taught, like going in the ring and having the wrestler hurt you until you don't want to go back in. Work out hard. Get your body tough where you can handle these bumps and bangs. There is nothing worse than these skinny kids who weigh 120 pounds and have never been in the ring in their life saying they want to be a wrestler. They go in the ring and start taking all these falls and hurting their body. You've got to build your body up first. And listen to what your teachers tell you. Then, when you finish your course, go in the ring and do it.

Keller: Have you ever seen Lightning Kid wrestle? I bring it up due to the similarity in name and style with Dynamite Kid, your former partner?

Smith: Yeah, as a matter of fact, I have. I think he's a real good wrestler. I've seen him on Global on ESPN a lot. I've seen him wrestle a lot. I think he's really good, though.

Keller: He doesn't have a lot of bulk, similar to when you and Dynamite started.

Smith: He doesn't have the immense size, but he has all the movements. That helps him in that way in the ring. Like if he couldn't do those moves, there would be no point in him being in the ring. But he can do all of those high-flying moves. He's doing well for himself, especially having gone to Japan.

Keller: How does someone with talent, but

As a person, I think Hulk Hogan is great. He's always been good to me. Every time I've been with him, I've always had a great time. He's straight forward. He doesn't talk about you behind your back. I think he's a great guy. I can't fault him in any way. He's done more for McMahon than McMahon ever did for him. He put wrestling back on the map as far as popularity goes for the people. As far as drawing crowds, McMahon tried it with a couple guys and replacing Hogan didn't work.

not a lot of massive size, like you, Dynamite, Lighting, and many others at different times in your careers, deal with the skepticism of promoters toward wrestlers who don't look like you do today?

Smith: Well, I still think the way I thought when I was 17 when I was in Calgary. Listen, you big guys can do all of these big tackles and powerslams, but I can do all of this flying stuff, so go ahead and do what you can do best and I will go ahead and do what I can do best. That was my attitude when I was in Calgary. I can't do all of that powerful stuff, but what I can do in the people's eyes is to outsmart them, like a little rat, I can run between their legs, give them a fast dropkick off the ropes.

Keller: And you worked against the bigger wrestler, too?

Smith: They didn't say, "Oh my god, what's this?" At first they thought, "Oh, no. He's gonna kill him." But as soon as I ran through his legs and dropkicked him from the top rope, they said, "Hey, this guy can take care of himself." So that's how I always got away with it. That's the advice I've got. Do your best and don't worry about size. Maybe some wrestlers have trouble putting on weight, either in the gym, with drugs, or whatever. Maybe they have trouble putting weight on. They have to make due with what they've got and that's the speed and weight-lifting moves.

Keller: At what point did you decide to start using steroids? Did other wrestlers put pressure on you to use them?

I wanted to go in the ring and be as big as them, but do more than they do. So instead of people saying, "He's smaller than them, that's why he can do it," I would turn around and go, "You're 270, I'm 270. You can't do that and I can." So I wanted to be just as big but do more than them.

Smith: Not really. I said it was just time to start building up.

Keller: Would you recommend steroids to someone who wanted to gain weight?

Smith: No, I can't do that. I can't recommend it.

Keller: Why not?

Smith: It's just something that each individual wants. You have to want it or you don't. I've said to people before, "Why don't you try this?" They go, "Oh, no, no, no." And I've said, "Okay, it's none of my business. Just trying to help." Now I just let the individual do what they want to do. They're illegal now so you can't recommend them to anyone. Doctors won't even prescribe them anymore.

Keller: It seems unfair that one guy is willing to break the law and use them and the other guy isn't. It creates an unfair disadvantage for the guy who doesn't choose to risk his health or break the rules. Successful testing would make it a more even playing field.

Smith: One of the reasons I did it was to get ahead. I wanted to go to Japan and do different things. Then I went to the WWF and said to myself, "Oooh, wow, these guys are really big." I thought some of the American wrestlers in Japan were big until I got to the WWF and everyone was 275, 280, and here I'm 235 and Dynamite is 220 or 215. So I decided to bulk up.

Keller: Do you think with your skill level you could have gotten by without steroids and bulking up?

Smith: I wanted to be kind of big while still doing what I do, you know? But, the big guys go in the ring and do powerslams, but I wanted to go in the ring and be as big as them, but do more than they do. So instead of people saying, "He's smaller than them, that's why he can do it," I would turn around and go, "You're 270, I'm 270. You can't do that and I can." So I wanted to be just as big but do more than them. That was my main goal, to be big but different. When I went back there in 1990, I was different. I was big and could still do what I could do. But as I did it, some people couldn't follow me, so I had to adapt to that.

KEVIN SULLIVAN

Kevin Sullivan is one of the more mysterious individuals in the wrestling industry. He began wrestling in 1970 and has been a babyface idol and a diabolical devil-worshipping heel, to a hardcore shoot-style brawler. Even though Sullivan now rarely leaves his feet in the ring, he is currently wrestling for both ECW and WCW. Besides a number of current events, Sullivan talks about how he got into wrestling and addresses the "devil worshipping" gimmick he used in the '80s. The interview was conducted Jan. 20, 1994.

Wade Keller: How did you get involved in professional wrestling?

Kevin Sullivan: I was working out in a gym in Boston and a guy approached me. His name was Peter Berry, he had wrestled in Europe and South Africa. I went up to Montreal and learned from a guy named Pat Jarrard, a big star in Europe at the time wrestling as Pat Kerry. He did the Eduard Carpentier style and he was a big, big draw. A lot of guys came out of Montreal, such as Ronnie Garvin, Alex Smirnoff, I think Terry Garvin, maybe Ricky Martel.

Keller: Why did you get into wrestling?

Sullivan: I liked it. I wanted to do it. It was something I thought I would like. It was something that intrigued me.

Keller: Were you a fan of wrestling while growing up?

Sullivan: There's no sense being in the wrestling business unless you are a fan of it. I wrestled amateur. I enjoyed wrestling. I wasn't probably as knowledgeable as fans are today. But I enjoyed it. Wrestling looked like something that was available all over the world. At the time, it looked like a nice way to see the world. I expected it would be a good profession to get into. Lucrative, maybe.

Keller: Were there other things you were considering doing for a living at that time that you would have done had you not gotten into wrestling?

Sullivan: I thought about becoming a psychiatrist at one time. Then I found out they commit more suicides than any other profession. I decided listening to everyone else's problems may not be the best way to go. At one time, I think that stat was true. It was a standing joke, at least.

Keller: When you were a kid, how much pro wrestling did you watch?

Sullivan: When I was a kid, they went for a while without wrestling on television in the Boston area, so we got wrestling from Providence. The local promoter, Tony Santos, ran without television. I don't think he believed in it. I'm a pretty good student of the wrestling business and from what I gather he was from the Jack Pfeffer school where you don't promote on television. Instead, you do handbills and radio. They didn't

believe in giving away the product then. So we got the WWF from Providence, Rhode Island. They didn't come into Boston until later. Then later on the WWF was in Boston and I'd watch.

Keller: When you first began to train to be a pro wrestler, were you surprised by the nature of the industry, the nature of the business, what it took to become a pro wrestler?

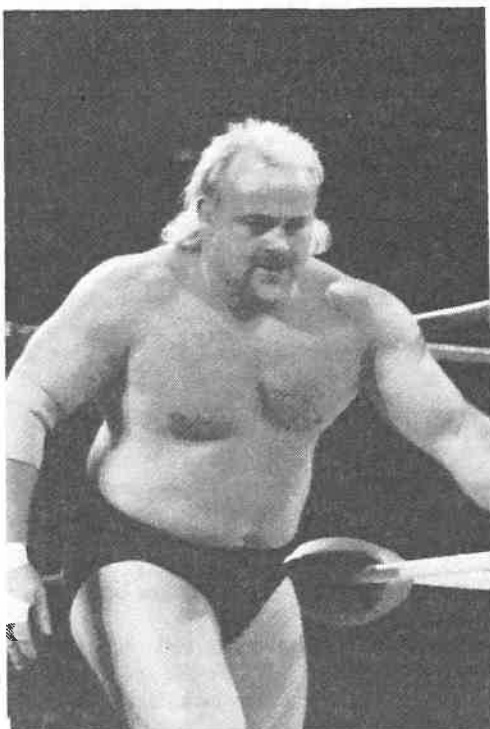
Sullivan: It was a lot harder than I thought it would be. I think it was a lot harder when I started. I sound like I'm talking about covered wagons once upon a time. But there were territories, you drove to the places and it wasn't uncommon to drive 300 miles. That I never expected. I never expected when I first got into the business that you actually wrestled six or seven days a week.

And when I was first getting into the business, I think the promotions did a very good job of that, you know? Because it was localized TV. The people in Tampa really didn't know there was wrestling Monday night in Miami. And the people in Miami didn't know there was wrestling in Tallahassee on Friday. In some respects, it made it special because you thought you were the only people seeing this. I think in some respects, it made people connect with you like they do with a local sports team.

As you probably know, Wade, I'm a lifelong sufferer of the Boston Red Sox. They'll never win, but I suffer with them. I associate with them. I think when we wrestle in a city 50 times a year, missing a Christmas or a Thanksgiving or a holiday or something, the people felt you were one of them.

Keller: Let's back up a little bit to your first match. Do you remember it and how did it go?

Sullivan: It was horrible. The guy I wrestled quit the business after my match.



Kevin Sullivan

Keller: Why?

Sullivan: (laughs) I wasn't completely smart to the business, so I was pumped up and wanted to make a good impression. I knew what the finish was supposed to be, but I wasn't completely aware of everything. When we trained, they were protective and would say, "Let's go through this three-quarters speed, or let's just show you half speed." When it came time for my match, rather than be broken in by the people who trained me, a guy approached me because he thought I had been working. I hadn't been working and I worked against a guy who hadn't been in the ring for two-and-a-half years and I was 18 years old and about 195 pounds. This guy was probably late-'40s, hadn't worked in two-and-a-half years and had probably been on the independent circuit his whole life and maybe worked once a month at the most. He was an insurance agent.

Well, I got him outside the ring. You know how you sling-shot a guy inside the ring. I was so pumped up and hit the ropes and pushed him rather than grabbing the ropes and sling-shotting him into the ring; he flew backwards into about five rows of chairs. He was wrestling with a mask. He got up, took his mask off, and walked back to the dressing room. I was still in the ring, but people told me he went in back, threw his wrestling stuff into a trash can, and walked out. I never saw him again. It was an ominous start.

Keller: Since then, you've...

Sullivan: Gotten better, hopefully?

Keller: Well, that's still happened a few times, right—a wrestler quitting after wrestling you?

Sullivan: (laughs) Yeah, yeah, it has.

Keller: Where did you go from there? How quickly did you progress in knowing how to work a match?

Sullivan: I always felt fairly comfortable, but I really didn't know what I was doing for five or six years. I don't think today guys know what they're doing (until they've wrestled that long). I'm not saying that to belittle anybody. Some people do catch on quicker. Dicky Slater and I started at approximately the same time and Dicky Slater the day we laced our boots could wrestle better than 98 percent of the people I ever saw—when Dicky was right. Dicky Slater was just one of those guys.

I'm talking about a guy who was once the source of our business—Eddie Graham—he said the average guy took five to seven years to learn the psychology of a match. And Eddie told me it took him about six years. And this guy was supposedly one of the geniuses in our business. I say this, not facetiously, I think he was one of the geniuses in our business. If he says it took him six years, I'm sure there are guys who think they know everything after six months that maybe don't.

Keller: Do you know nearly everything that you could learn about the business or want to learn?

Sullivan: I don't think that I'm any smarter than anybody else that's in our business. I haven't learned all there is to know, for sure. If I did, I

would write a book about how to have the best matches possible and how to have the greatest ratings on TV and how to sell pay-per-views and how to sell out every building in a market.

That's the thing about wrestling. You can become a student and really learn and it's an interesting thing. It can be an ironic business. If you look at things aesthetically, saying this guy should draw a lot of money because look at him, he's chiseled, he looks terrific, he's athletic, and he can do a moonsault over the top rope, he can dropkick, and he can hiptoss better than anybody I've ever seen.

Then you look at somebody and say, "How could this guy be cheered by the people? Look at him, he's got a bald head, he's got a beard, he's got a thick bulldog body, and he talks with a horrible accent." I've just described Mad Dog Vachon. People cheered him because he was a dog. See what I'm saying? Wouldn't you have chosen the guy ripped to the bone with long hair and good looks, a guy you think would sell the merchandising and then you have the Mad Dog biting a cage with his teeth and he'll sell the building out? There is no set of rules and we all learn every day, hopefully.

Keller: Do you have any memories that stand out during your first few years in wrestling?

Sullivan: You know something, Wade, I don't want to sound like a party pooper or nothing, but the truth of the matter is, I'm a person who looks in the present and in the future. You're not gonna believe this, but I don't have a library of myself until when I started going to Japan because my kids wanted the books. I don't have one wrestling book of myself. The only tape I have is from (Jim) Cornette who was nice enough to put together a whole piece on me and send it to me so he could see what I did. Paul E. (Dangerously) did the same thing for me to see what I did. Now, it's a different time and a different era, but I look forward rather than back. I think, for me, it's a good way to live.

I can't tell you one incident that I can say, "I remember this particular incident or this hell of a match." But if you're looking for a turning point it was being a heel for the first time.

Keller: That was around 1980?

Sullivan: Yeah. Because I had been on the other side of the fence for ten years. Then I realized how much I didn't know.

Keller: What were the circumstances surrounding you turning heel for the first time?

Sullivan: I have such a pleasant personality, I thought it would be a lot easier. (laughs) The first time I was a heel was in Knoxville. The second time was in Atlanta. The only reason that one stands out is I turned and actually turned twice. I turned on Steve Keirn. The reason that stands out is Steve and I have been lifelong friends. At the time, Tony Atlas was my partner and I turned on Tony eventually, too. It was a drawn out story. It worked out very well.

Keller: You joked about your personality. Do you consider your personality to fit the mold of a heel in wrestling more than a babyface?

Sullivan: I don't try to be a wrestler 24 hours a

day. I try to be the persona for the time I go in the ring to the time I get out of it. After that, I can separate reality from fiction. I know who I am. I have no problem with that.

Keller: Did you have any apprehension going heel or wasn't it a big deal?

Sullivan: It's something I think everybody wants to try. It's like actors want to direct and directors want to act, right? It's the same thing, I think.

Keller: What have you found to be the main differences between working as a heel and as a face in the ring? How did you have to adapt?

Sullivan: I don't think I changed right away. The style progressed later. I think I tried to do it with attitude. We used to have a lot more time with interviews. There was a segment set aside. A change was an important thing, thought-out, laid-out for a very long time. I don't think I changed my style in the ring, but since that time it's had a metamorphosis.

Keller: One of the things long-time fans think of when they think of Kevin Sullivan, the wrestler, over the years is "devil worshipping" as something that was pretty controversial at the time. How did that come about?

Sullivan: One of the magazines—I don't want to say which one—took it upon themselves to put something on the cover. I can verify this. If anybody can find the Florida paper where I mentioned that word, the devil, I'd like them to show me. The word I used was "Abudiune." It's a Hindu god. It has nothing to do with devil worship. It has nothing to do with Satanism. It has nothing to do with Demonism. It was just a word brought over from the Orient. One of the magazines, of course, tried to make it into a tabloid thing. It continued to grow, so in a regional territory that I have no saying over, they read it and thought I was saying things like that. Do you remember what the magazines were like? It was just sensationalism, tabloid. Some of the guys who are editors of these magazines bitch and moan about you guys today, yet they're the ones who were so far out it was ridiculous.

And one of the babyfaces in Florida talked about me, saying, "He's evil, he's no good, he's devious. He's possessed. He's diabolical." The other thing is I lived my gimmick, I wore my black robe. I came to the building with the black robe on and left with the black robe on.

Keller: A lot of people have told me over the years that there was some semblance of genius to your gimmick. To what extent is that the case?

Sullivan: I wasn't an alter boy. Obviously, if these people believed it, then that means I must have been very good. Maybe some of whom believed it were no longer in the business, and if they were in the business, maybe they weren't the brightest people in the world. Maybe the thing about me studying it? I might have studied the occult and some Hindu Eastern philosophy, but that doesn't mean studying it is horrible. Are we going into book burning? I thought America was past that. It is still America, I think. We can have our opinion and still do have freedom of choice.

We forget that maybe, us being a Judao-Christian nation, forget that not every nation in the world is Judao-Christian. I think there is something in the United States that separates church and state and freedom of religion. I don't condone anybody doing anything, but I don't also say, "If you don't go to the same church I do, you're wrong." I don't believe that. I'm glad we were able to get that out of the way. I'm glad I was able to say that freely because the people that do know me, know me. Believe me, you're not the only one who has told me this. I've had guys in the business come up to me and tell me, "I always thought you were a little off and really into that."

Keller: Is Hindu Eastern Philosophy something that you have studied or something that you also prescribe to?

Sullivan: It's not something that I went out and studied so much as when this gimmick progressed, I had to make these interviews more and more outrageous. So I borrowed some of King Curtis's lines—one of the greatest if not the greatest interview of all time—and talked about rolling the bones of Bonaris. That's a thing they do in India for good luck. It has nothing to do with Demonism. It's a ritual. So people sitting at home think I'm insane and I'm carving people up. It helped me. I don't look back on it and regret it. I regret that some of it was taken out of context. I regret that maybe I scared somebody. If any kids stayed up at night and thought I was the bogeyman, I regret that. But I scared myself, too, during that time, so it's okay (laughs).

Keller: Some promoters wouldn't book you because of the gimmick? Or is that more folklore than reality?

Sullivan: I think that's folklore. But let me ask you this. Do you think they would have been able to have an Undertaker if I hadn't broken that ground? I wasn't the only one. After me, there came a lot of rough copies. I'm not comparing myself to the Undertaker because I've known him since he started and I think he's one of the greatest talents ever in this business. He maintains his character completely, 100 percent. That's why he's over. Since people didn't know him at first, it was like old time territories. People hadn't seen him before and they believed the gimmick.

Keller: So did you ever have a problem getting bookings?

Sullivan: No, I never did. It might have been a problem, but in those days when I was doing that shtick, people were more interested in putting asses every 17 inches. They would overlook things. They might tell you to tone things down, but they didn't even understand it.

Keller: In looking back, do you think the fans understood it or was it too complicated or outrageous?

Sullivan: I think it scared the fans. I had a bunch of weirdos around me. Everybody I had was really something to look at. The people would say, "This ain't the same stuff I've been seeing on TV." I had Mark Lewin, the Purple Haze, one of the great heels I've seen. I had Bob Roop as Maya Singh with half of his head shaved and half of his beard shaved, too. I had the Fallen

Angel shave Luna's head on TV. I gave her the name Luna that day on television. So if you were watching television that day and saw this beautiful woman—and Luna is beautiful with her long blonde hair—and another girl shave her head on television, you're gonna think while watching on TV something strange is going on, but you better go down to the arena to see what was going on. I was trying to draw money.

Keller: How did you get Luna to agree to do something like that?

Sullivan: She's a real professional. I've worked with a lot of women as valets, managers, and the like. She is one of the most professional people in this business. She is really into her character. She is the Luna. To me right now she is one of the best interviews in the business. When Luna was feuding with Sherri, I would have paid to see those two fight. And her interviews were so intense, I think they overshadowed a lot of things. They were fabulous.

But, like I was saying, I had Luna, I had the Lock, I had Fallen Angel, I had Roop, I had King Curtis himself for a short period. I was surrounded by magnificent weirdness. Curtis was the best speaker in the business. I remember one time I was cutting an interview and I wanted to impress Curtis. I was talking about everything in the world from a full moon to what I was going to do to our opponents, (Blackjack) Mulligan and Barry Windham. I was into what I thought was a nine on a ten scale. Out of the corner of my eye I caught the monitor and there was Curtis with his head shaven, laid back, with his eyes rolled back and humming. Fallen Angel had three inch long add-on finger nails and she was rubbing his head and he was chanting. I knew right then he had gone by me without saying a word.

I worked with Blackjack Mulligan, Dusty Rhodes, and Barry Windham at that time. The Junkyard Dog some. How could you work for a better cast of characters? There were a lot of factors involved. I was lucky to be surrounded by great talent.

Keller: Of all the promoters you worked for, whom did you respect the most?

Sullivan: Most of the promoters I didn't respect, I wasn't there very long. I didn't stay places where I didn't feel I was going to get a fair break. Vince McMahon Sr. I've never worked for Vince Jr., so I don't know him, but his father was a wonderful human being.

Keller: What made Senior wonderful?

Sullivan: I was a young, young man at the time. His father was amazing. He would book main events six months ahead of time in the Gardens. I didn't understand how he did it. We used to do the TV in the old Philadelphia Arena and the next day go to Harrisburg, Pa. In Philadelphia, there was an open area. Vince sat on a table surrounded by Monsoon and Skaaland and you couldn't get to him. If you had a problem, he would see you. But he was busy doing his TV, watching his TV, and booking. I think Vince knew that I had an interest in the business. One day I came up and asked him how he could possibly project six months ahead of time. This was before pay-per-view. This was when we

I always felt fairly comfortable, but I really didn't know what I was doing for five or six years. Eddie Graham told me it took him about six years. And this guy was supposedly one of the geniuses in our business. If he says it took him six years, I'm sure there are guys who think they know everything after six months that maybe don't.

were doing shows week-to-week and we were doing three weeks of TV at a time. I asked how could he project the main events and the semi-final. He said, "Well, why don't you sit down here and watch this TV and I'll try to explain some stuff to you." He was nice enough to let me sit down beside him and learn.

I had a personal tragedy one time in my family and I had to go away. When I came back, there was a weekly check bigger than I would have made waiting for me. That was just him. I learned a lot from him and respected him.

Keller: How about some other promoters you respected?

Sullivan: Eddie Graham, same thing, took me when I was a young man. I was lucky that there was a breeding ground for some fine talent. I became very close to Eddie. Mike (Graham) and I are still very close to this day. There was Mike, Eddie, Steve Keirn, Dick Slater, myself, Bob Orton, we were all young kids on the same card beating on each other trying to learn something. I learned a lot from Eddie. He was very, very nice to me. He would take me out on fishing trips and ask me about television, what I thought about it. He would tell me what was right and what was wrong and try to show me some things, try to turn the light on over my head.

Then I worked for Mr. Jim Barnette, who a lot of people don't know this, probably started television nationwide in the early '50s on the old Dumont Network and produced such stars as Verne Gagne, Dick the Bruiser, The Original Sheik, Hans Schmidt, and later on had a successful run in Australia and he had a successful run in the old Georgia Championship Wrestling which is now World Championship Wrestling. I learned a lot from Mr. Barnett. I was a babyface at the time and I saw a match one time—I know he doesn't remember this, I was in Tokyo and I watched Tenryu work when he was a young boy and I thought he had a hell of a match. I had just met Jim a couple of times and I said to him, as a young enthusiastic punk, "Mr. Barnett, didn't you think that was a tremendous match?" All he said to me was, "Tenryu missed too much

as a babyface." I learned something right there. He's great at recognizing talent where some people can't. He was the innovator of national television. He was one of the innovators when Vince went nationwide with the WWF. He's still a senior advisor with WCW and I still admire him.

Some of the newer promoters I admire are Tod Gordon at ECW. Tod is a man of his word. Tod pays his guys very well. He's giving young talent a chance. He's a stickler for things to go well. But when things do go well, he's the first one to tell you it went excellent. When Tod tells you something, it's his word. I think he's found a little niche there in Philadelphia. He's going quite well. I think Paul E. is helping him put together great TV. So I admire Tod very much and have become very good friends with him.

Keller: Any other promoters worth noting that you've run across and learned from?

Sullivan: I learned some from Jimmy Crockett. Jimmy knew the Carolinas. He knew what drew. Jimmy knew his towns very well. He knew wrestling. I think Jimmy also knew angles, what angle would get over and what wouldn't. He was smart in this sense that he knew if one thing didn't draw, he had a couple of other things. He would have a couple of guys hot and send them to little towns, secondary towns, when he had the Carolinas and Virginia going, and that little town would sell out and do as well sometimes as the major town. To do business in two towns on the same night, you have to know something.

One of the smartest guys I was around was Leo Garabaldi. He was the booker in Atlanta in the early '70s and he booked Florida and he booked Texas. He wrestled in the early '50s, he and his father, they were the Garabaldis. I think if you would ask Roddy Piper this, he would tell you the same thing, he helped Piper a lot. He was a real student of the business. I learned a lot from him, a lot of little things, that end up being big things.

Keller: Did you run across any promoters whom you had a bad impression of?

Sullivan: Yeah, Roy Shires (in California). He might have been successful as a promoter and he might have paid well, because some of my better paydays came from Roy Shires. But the way he carried himself in public made me ashamed to be associated with the man. He spit on television floors, he cussed all the time. Hey, my language is the worst in the locker room. But I know when I'm at a TV station or with executives or with people who need to be shown respect, I don't cuss and spit on the floor. He had a really arrogant attitude. The reason why Roy made it, there's two reasons. First of all, he was the first one on television in Northern California. And he was on Ch. 2 out of Oakland, the strongest channel. Plus, he had Ray Stevens and Pat Patterson. If you couldn't draw with those two guys, you couldn't draw with Godzilla and Barkley. I mean, we're talking about two of the greatest workers of all times! You had them for ten years in your territory. Please. And the other thing he had was Peter Maivia and there's more Samoans in the Northern California area than all of Samoa. Peter was one of the great talents. He was 320 pounds of raw muscle. He also had Dominic DeNucci out

there. There's a lot of Italians. He had a lot of ethnics. He had TV first. But the main thing was he had Patterson and Stevens. Give any company Patterson and Stevens today and six months from now they'll be selling out.

Keller: What was it about Patterson and Stevens that makes so many people say the same thing as you say about them? What made them so successful?

Sullivan: What made Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire? Fred Astaire had plenty of dance partners, and so did Ginger. But when you say one, who do you think of? Their matches were comparable to the Dory Funk-Jack Brisco matches. Or, the Ric Flair-Rick Steamboat matches—that match they had in Chicago a few years ago, one of the greatest matches I've ever seen. One of the other greatest matches I've ever seen—and I know neither of these guys—Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels had a match at a pay-per-view where Bret Hart ended up with the sharpshooter on Michaels. It was also one of the great matches. You could take the Hart-Michaels match and put it back with Patterson and Stevens and they would draw. That match would draw anywhere. That's how good they were.

Keller: In what area of the country did you enjoy working the most? Which promotion was the most exciting to work for?

Sullivan: The next one. I've always tried to make the best of every situation I'm in. Usually, if I didn't, I tried to do my best either way. I've enjoyed every place I've been.

Keller: When did you become a student of the game beyond worrying about your own match? At what point did you realize you took wrestling more seriously than other wrestlers?

Sullivan: I don't know if I took wrestling more seriously than other wrestlers. I really don't. For me to say that would be ridiculous. But I felt I had better learn and do the best with the ability God has given me. I was going to do my best job possible. I think most guys in this business do that. I think most guys are in this business because they like it. They try to learn.

Keller: When did you start to become interested in the booking aspect of wrestling?

Sullivan: The first day. The first day I was smart to it, anyway, knowing about finishes. I saw things and saw how things were created. I thought there must be a reason why these people are here. It's exciting.

Keller: What was your first exposure to being part of the booking of a promotion? When did you get official input for the first time?

Sullivan: When I first went to Florida, Bill Watts had taken over. I had been in it a year and a half. We used to run two towns back then and Tuesday, Tampa ran. We had a lot of guys because we had two towns. The second town was Ft. Myers and people used to shudder to go to Ft. Myers. It was 120 miles away when you could be home in Tampa. Well, Bill gave me Ft. Myers to book. So I was there quite a bit. That was my first chance.

Keller: Why did Bill Watts put you in charge of that area? Is that something you had shown interest in?

Sullivan: I think so.

Keller: How was your first experience booking?

Sullivan: It wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. (laughs) Again, we had localized TV, so I did get to put an interview on the TV. Like I said, the nice thing about it was it was Keirn, Graham, myself, Slater, and Orton. All of us young kids travelling down to the woods on Tuesday nights. We damn near killed each other, but something worked. We did fairly well, yeah.

Keller: At what point were you part of a major booking run?

Sullivan: I did Knoxville in '78. I came back and was in the Florida office either as the booker or as an assistant booker from '83 to '86. I booked Hawaii. When Jimmy (Crockett) bought Florida, he brought me up into the Carolinas. I was an assistant up there before the buyout by Turner.

Keller: This question has become a cliché, but it's still relevant: Was Vince McMahon Jr.'s national expansion and the other increased exposure that followed good for the industry, bad for the industry, or inevitable?

Kevin Sullivan: We're a global village. Marshall McCullin said that in 1948 that we would become a global village. I went to Singapore. I hadn't been there in a few years. There's a Kentucky Fried Chicken, a McDonalds, a Wendy's. They're all over the place. It was going to happen, whether it was Vince or... Ted Williams. Somebody was going to do it. It's a different world. There's a National Hockey League franchise in Miami and not in Minneapolis. The world has changed.

Keller: Do you think the expansion by McMahon was handled properly by him and was the reaction to that expansion by others handled properly? Or were there some obvious miss steps along the way?

Sullivan: I think every action has a reaction. How many years were the Yankees a super team, then they went through a dry spell. You can't run everything perfectly forever. I've never worked up there, so I don't know their inner-workings, and I could be 100 percent wrong, but it seems besides wrestling, marketing is a very, very important part of their business. And I think maybe that they've gone to the marketing extreme where Michael Jordan sold merchandise sh-t because he was the greatest basketball player of all times. Shawn Bradley, I don't know if he could sell the same amount of merchandise, but if before the game he came out and flames shot out of his mouth and out of his butt at the same time, I think he would sell a lot of merchandise. And maybe you would go to see Shawn Bradley shoot those flames a couple of times, but if he couldn't play like Michael, you would say, "I wish it was the old days when Michael Jordan used to play." People will be saying that in a few years. People are saying that about baseball. It's too watered down, there's a guy who comes in to pitch one inning now, they've got a set-up guy and a closer.

I think part of the formula that works will be some blending of some of the types of wrestling, such as the Japanese styles, some AAA, some EMLL, maybe some European. I'm really impressed with Steve Regal—then throw in what we have already. A blending of all of that, you'll see some great matches.

That's where I think the WWF might have gone awry. But they're making money, and that's the bottom line. In our corporate world, our bottom line is making money.

Keller: Do you think Vince McMahon was successful in his peak years at the expense of other promoters and the future and well-being of the wrestling industry on a whole?

Sullivan: Dinosaurs died, didn't they? You either change or die. You better compete. They didn't compete. Vince didn't do it. They did it to themselves. They should have been willing to compete.

Keller: When you think back to the early-'80s, what was your reaction when Vince McMahon expanded? Did you see expansion coming? And what about other promoters at the time?

Sullivan: I knew it was going to happen. What did other promoters think? I don't know if this is true, but I heard there was a big meeting one time and Vince McMahon said they couldn't even decide what to order for lunch. They couldn't agree on even that. That's what I heard. So, what if they had banded together using one TV using all the stars they had available to them at the time—and I think Eddie Graham and Jim Crockett tried to do that, and something went awry—maybe that wouldn't have even stopped Vince. Because besides the television, Vince had the media. You couldn't open a *USA Today* without seeing Hulk Hogan or watch John Rivers without seeing Hogan. You saw them on the news. It was a real media blitz of the type that comes on maybe once in a generation. He lived in the media capital of the world.

Keller: As a student of the game as you were, did you look at Hulk Hogan and Vince McMahon and say to yourself, "I'm watching professional wrestling as I know it being redefined," or did you think as even McMahon feared around *Wrestlemania II* that the WWF expansion might drive McMahon out of the business?

Sullivan: A lot of people will disagree with me, but a lot of people will agree with me. Hulk Hogan does Hulk Hogan very well. I don't care what anybody says. He changed the game. We all made money because of Hogan. Hogan put wrestling back on the map even though we were doing well before him. He does Hulk Hogan better than anybody else. The people came to see him do Hulk Hogan. Because he didn't moonsault, that has nothing to do with him being Hulk Hogan. He did what the people wanted to see and he did it to the best of his ability. He was obviously the biggest success we've ever had in this business.

People forget what brought the first *Wrestlemania* was Roddy Piper and Hulk Hogan in a match called the "Brawl to Settle It All" and the police jumped in the ring. It was on MTV and all of these rock 'n' roll singers were there tongue in cheek. Then they showed all these film clips of these guys beating each other up pretty good. The average viewer would watch and say, "Hey, something's wrong here." Because they were two great performers.

Did I think they'd ever get off *Wrestlemania I* and live to talk about it? I thought if he got there, he'd capture the public's imagination. I didn't know if he'd get there. I didn't know if they could sustain that media blitz. I think if the media blitz had waned just a little bit, if they didn't get MTV and this tie-in and that tie-in and Cyndi Lauper and USA Network, they might not have made it to *Wrestlemania I*. Once they got past One, I knew they had it. They created a whole new group of fans—kids. They captured the kids.

Keller: Were there negative aspects to McMahon's expansion? There was a time before the expansion which stopped soon thereafter where there were certain nights of the year where many more arenas around the country would sell out and more wrestlers had full-time work? Did overexposure lead to the decrease in arena business? And is it fair to blame McMahon for what was probably inevitable overexposure?

Sullivan: I think everyone would have done it. We're into a world where we sit at home in the confines of our house and turn on pay-per-view. We like to watch everything on television. We don't really like to go out. I think there will be an inevitable period of growth, of new interest. Like, look at the new groups. Tod Gordon's done a good job. Jimmy Cornette's done a wonderful job. I guess the Mexican group has come in here and done gangbusters. Wrestling may go back to something which features a little more competitive matches and a little less merchandising, but there will always be merchandising. You have to have ratings and do well at pay-per-view. The days of the weekly events are gone forever, I believe. There will be another change, and probably a major one, in coming years and it will probably be for the best. I'm an optimistic person and that's how I think.

The world, as we say, shrinks. Can you imagine the American style, the Japanese style, the Mexican style all blending. It's gonna produce some great, great matches. It opens up some great match possibilities. I don't know too many guys in Mexico, but I do know Konnan and he's a

terrific wrestler. I would love to see Konnan against Muta.

Keller: What are the keys to a resurgence in the wrestling industry?

Sullivan: I think part of the formula that works will be some blending of some of the types of wrestling, such as the Japanese style. There's all kinds of Japanese styles. A little part of this group, that group, some AAA, some EMLL, maybe some European style—I'm really impressed with Steve Regal—then throw in what we have such as Vader, Ric Flair, The Undertaker. A blending of all of that, you'll see some great matches.

Keller: Do you believe a promoter can succeed by trying to attract all kinds of wrestling fans by encompassing a wide variety of styles? For instance, McMahon was successful after more or less writing off a large portion of his fans—the traditional hardcore crowd from the '70s—in exchange for gaining a whole new fresh audience he could merchandise to. Is the next key trying to appeal to a new group?

Sullivan: I think wrestling used to appeal to a lot more different people. I think Vince did the right thing because he was hugely successful. But I also know that my boy knew who Hogan was wrestling until about three years ago, then he gave up wrestling and found young girls. He's 15 now. He's still a Michael Jordan fan and a Shaquille O'Neil fan. He's still a Hulk Hogan fan and a Sting fan, but he doesn't know who they're wrestling anymore. I think with a mixture of the young talent that hasn't been given a chance and some of the young talent that has been given a chance all over the world, I look for really good wrestling. I look for good things in the wrestling business.

Keller: What specifically in Japan do you think could be brought to the States?

Sullivan: The competition. When you lace on your boots over there, you know you're going to work hard and bust your ass because you're going to be competing for the crowd.

If Sunday, on the SuperBowl, the referee gets knocked down and they score a touchdown, but they don't see it because the referee was knocked down and the other officials were looking another way, and the SuperBowl is decided that way, well, I wouldn't watch the SuperBowl again. But if it's a hell of a game, I don't care who wins, as long as I see a winner—and the winner is the team that deserved to win.

Keller: The opposing view is that with clean winners and losers in pro wrestling, you kill off the credibility of the losers and don't build toward a rematch or future bouts. Is that valid?

Sullivan: Not if the matches are competitive. And when it ends, it doesn't have to be every single time that it's clean and decisive. There is an occasional split decision in boxing. There is an occasional bad decision. Pat O'Connor was a champion and lost to Buddy Rogers and when people said it would never happen, they drew 41,000 in Comiskey Park back in '61. He went for a dropkick, Rogers moved out of the way, he hit

the top rope and rolled and Buddy was down and topped Pat. It still can be done.

Keller: As wrestling has become more global, is it more difficult to get heat the traditional way by getting fans to legitimately dislike somebody when the fans are much more aware than they were 20 years ago to the way wrestling works?

Sullivan: If fans come and enjoy themselves, as long as they pay for their ticket and enjoy it and want to come back, they can cheer or they can boo, it doesn't matter. As long as they enjoy what they saw and got their money's worth. I know we're also in an age of an anti-hero. I don't think you can be as traditional (with babyface and heel roles). With some guys you can. There are some guys out there who are traditional who you can go with. I don't think the Original Sheik would be a matinee idol at any time, but he still fills arenas in Japan, as you know. Then there are guys who are handsome and chiseled who should be matinee idols.

Keller: Do you believe overexposure has been the primary cause of the pro wrestling recession?

Sullivan: It might be too much wrestling. And too much repetitious wrestling. What happens is, if you have a lot of TVs to book, you can be repetitious. The other thing is, years ago when I was in Florida and a guy came in from Texas and the other guy from Atlanta, they both worked differently, so it's a different style. When you arrive in one big company, you begin to work like everybody else in that company. That's how I perceive it, so you see a lot of clotheslines because one guy did it and it got over. And you see somebody else suplex somebody off the top rope because it got over. But you start, no matter how great it is, you start to see it over and over and over again. So when you go to the house show, you've seen it over and over and over again. The guys who have worked for Tod (Gordon) or Smoky Mountain or some of the other independents, they've learned a different style so when they get picked up by a major company or if Tod grows or Jimmy grows, they will help the business by helping to change it.

Keller: Have you seen many of ECW's television shows?

Sullivan: I watched a few of them. One I watched about 20 minutes of and didn't realize I had yet to see a match actually in the ring. Paul made it that entertaining. Paul had put together a special on Terry Funk and it was great.

Keller: What do you think about ECW's style both on television and what's offered at the house shows?

Sullivan: It's an alternate style. I think they're smart enough to know that if they go into different markets, they'll have to temper their TV a little, but give them what they give them in the arenas because they give them a magnificent product. And Jimmy Cornette gives them the same thing. Very similar, very similar products.

Keller: When you look at ECW and SMW, both of which you have worked for regularly over the past year, in the ring, the action is similar in some

ways, yet the booking is quite different. Cornette follows the traditional, well-planned heel vs. babyface storylines whereas Paul E.'s style is more sporadic with three heels on top. How does that jell? Can promotions be that different and succeed nationally?

Sullivan: Yes and no. Jimmy's is tailor made for that part of the country. Paul E.'s is tailor made for that part of the country. Believe it or not, the people cheer me in Philadelphia. They're the only people in the country who would. They thought Mario Lemieux was faking it. They booed Dr. J. They booed Mike Schmidt. The guy only hit 536 homeruns and went to the Hall of Fame. It's a hard town. But they're both tailor made and they've both been successful. It shows if they can be successful there, they could also be successful in other ways.

Keller: Can ECW or SMW, with only minor adjustments, be successful nationally? Or are there only one or two formulas that will work nationally?

Sullivan: For me to say there are only one or two formulas that could work would be completely wrong. I think there are a lot of formulas that work. You just need to find which ones will. That's the hard part. Again, if I had the answer, I would write a book and never leave the beach. I'd be counting the whales. But because of these two alternative styles, we're starting to see some good television, good competitive matches, interesting matches—three top heels going at one another? Very innovative, isn't it?

Keller: Have you ever worked in the Memphis territory run by Jerry Jarrett and Jerry Lawler?

Kevin Sullivan: Yes, for a short period. In about '82 for about six weeks.

Keller: How does the impression you got from working there compare to some of the other territories and why do you think the USWA has outsurvived all other territories?

Sullivan: Two smart people. Actually, three, because Bill Dundee was there, too. Jarrett, Lawler, and Dundee know the town, know what gets over. They had a great performer, a great interviewer, and a smart owner.

Keller: A lot of promoters today see non-U.S. style wrestling as a cultural barrier that can't translate into American profits. When will pro wrestling get past that mentality?

Sullivan: They better learn that NAFTA passed. I think that most of the promoters are actually realizing that.

Keller: What did Jim Crockett Promotions and the Jim Herd-run NWA fail to do to compete effectively with the WWF? You were there on the booking committee and as a wrestler. What were some of the key mistakes that were made?

Sullivan: After the buyout, a mistake was trying to compete in markets where he had already grasped that audience. Trying to go for the same audience. If we had tried to go for the Harley Davidson riders, we would have been okay. We tried to compete with the same people, and his people we couldn't compete with. Even

CNN, which Turner owns, was telling you what happened at Wrestlemania, yet we couldn't get them to report on our pay-per-views. So we had such a mass media blitz to compete with that we should have been different, gone the other way.

Keller: What is "the other way"?

Sullivan: I think going the other way would have been giving the whole television cards like Steamboat vs. Flair, Arn Anderson vs. Steve Austin, and good, strong wrestling matches. (Vince McMahon) was going the merchandise route, we should have gone the complete wrestling route. With the wrestlers we had, we shouldn't have tried to go after the people he already captured.

Keller: Was the "We Wrestle" campaign what you are talking about?

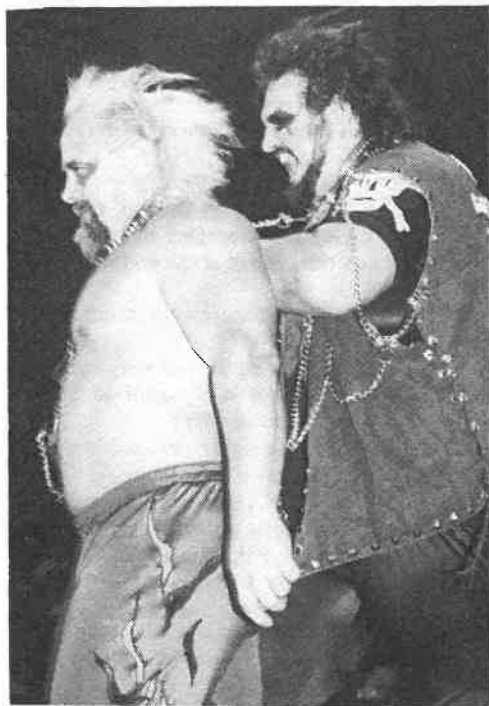
Sullivan: (That slogan) was used before us, before the committee. I don't know where they came up with that.

Keller: Take me inside the board room doors? How were decisions made? How did the personalities work together as part of the committee?

Sullivan: Generally speaking, the committees can work, but you have to agree to disagree. If you agree to disagree, then if you can get enough people that you believe in that they're doing the best thing for the company, you're all right. If you agree to agree to disagree and not take things personally, accept that it's just business, yeah it can work.

Keller: How did or didn't it work in your days in WCW?

Sullivan: Well, I'll tell ya' a story. One time we were having a meeting and people were getting up to go to the bathroom. We had a long meeting. Every time they left, we'd knock 'em. So finally it was my turn to go to the bathroom and I asked



Kevin Sullivan and One Man Gang

After I tried to kill Paul E. for a month, I knew he was going to make it. I used to come up with the damndest things to get him whacked around. He would get whacked around and he'd get up and he'd be chattering to Tombstone, who was his protege then, and coming up with ideas. I knew he got it.

everyone to come into the men's room with me because I didn't want them knocking me. We couldn't agree to disagree?

Keller: What was the direction that the NWA at that point (1988) wanted to go in? Was it to do what Vince was doing but to do it better?

Sullivan: I think we were given the guidelines to try to compete with him and try to do it better. The truth of the matter was we couldn't do what he was doing. He had such a head start on us. The Hulk had been around five, six years. He was at the hottest he ever was. NBC was doing specials before their pay-per-views for them. We just couldn't catch him. That wasn't our fault. We were given those parameters to work with. If you were given those same parameters now, you may be able to catch him.

Keller: I'm going to mention a few names. Give me some comments on your personal experiences with them or your professional opinion of them. Let's start by going back to your Florida days: Dusty Rhodes.

Sullivan: I think Dusty is a smart talent, a smart guy, a great interview. Everybody has written him off a hundred times and he's still around.

Keller: Do you believe in Dusty's style of booking using as the examples the times he has been fresh rather than at the end of a long booking run?

Sullivan: My batting stance would be different.

Keller: What was Dusty's style working with wrestlers and how did it compare to some other bookers you worked with?

Sullivan: That really isn't a fair question, and I'll tell you why, Wade—I'm answering it. How he dealt with somebody one-on-one, I didn't see how he handled it. How he dealt with me was how he dealt with me. For me to tell you he dealt with someone good or bad, I couldn't tell you because I wasn't there when he was dealing with them one-on-one.

Keller: Barry Windham.

Sullivan: Great, great talent. I put him on my

ten fingers as one of the best talents I've ever seen. Great worker.

Keller: What happened to him? You've watched his career. What went wrong along the way, considering he should probably be a world champion right now or at least a contender atop a promotion had his career gone as most predicted?

Sullivan: They flip-flopped him too much. I heard now he's injured, he had some knee surgery.

Keller: How about Bill Watts?

Sullivan: I worked for Bill for a short time in Florida? I know a lot of people didn't get along with Bill. In his short time in Florida, I got along with Bill because I didn't let him bark at me. I know he ran a very successful territory. What happened to him up in WCW, I don't know.

Keller: Ric Flair.

Sullivan: One of the true legends of our sport. He goes out and gives you 110 percent every night. He's a credit to the business.

Keller: From his previous run as a booker, is that something you think he would be good at or would want to do long term?

Sullivan: I don't know that he'd want that. I really don't. He has some successful gyms now, I don't know that he'd want that. I think he would be very good at it.

Keller: Jim Cornette? He's one of the younger, more ambitious minds in the business.

Sullivan: A brilliant, brilliant man. A brilliant guy.

Keller: What makes him brilliant?

Sullivan: He's a student. He stays up all night and studies. He's smart enough to know that he doesn't know everything. Innovative, creative as hell. He's witty. I loved his rebuttal (to the Wise, Va. riot story) [laughs]. I'm poking fun, Wade. He's a great talker. And a great commentator, too. That's one thing people don't give him credit for. He can get over angles and things very, very well when he commentates.

Keller: What about Paul E. Dangerously? Compare him to Jim Cornette.

Sullivan: Paul's a brilliant, innovative person. He's put MTV-like wrestling on ECW. I think they're two different people and they go two different directions, but arrive at the same place—success.

I started Paul E. down in Florida. I take pride that I did. I think Paul E. is a brilliant mind, very aggressive, innovative as hell. I see a lot of good things for Paul E. in the future. And I'm going to be proud of him the rest of my life, so everyone can get used to it.

Keller: What was your impression of him the first time you worked with him?

Sullivan: I tried to kill him. After I couldn't kill him, I said, "Jeez, if I can't kill this kid, you might as well do something with him." And I didn't have to do anything with him. He had figured out what to do already.

Keller: Did you sense early on that he was going to try to be an important mover and shaker in this industry?

Sullivan: After I tried to kill him for a month, I knew he was going to make it and be something. I used to come up with the damndest things to get him whacked around. He would get whacked around and he'd get up and he'd be chattering to Tombstone, who was his protege then, and coming up with ideas. I knew he got it.

Keller: What about Jim Crockett?

Sullivan: I worked for Jimmy for a short time. I enjoyed the stay when I was with Jimmy. I think he knew his territory. Right after I went to work, Jimmy was bought out.

Keller: What do you think of Crockett starting up a new promotion?

Sullivan: I don't know much about it. I've heard a lot, but I've never sat down with the man, I've never talked to him. So I don't want to spread something I'm not sure of. And I think that happens quite a bit.

Keller: I know it does. Let me switch gears. What was your initial impression of legitimate journalistic coverage of pro wrestling with "insider newsletters" when they first came around and how has that changed over the last ten years or so?

Sullivan: My first impression was I couldn't believe it, you know what I mean? I just couldn't believe what I saw.

Keller: Why not?

Sullivan: I didn't know where they could get all this information. And there was one that I particularly didn't know and then later I figured it out. There was a meeting in my office and there were only a few people in my office. I was on the telephone to another booker in another territory. And the next week they brought the newsletter, the *Observer*, in to me and there was the exact thing I said. I couldn't figure out how he did it. Since that time, I've watched and I've read and you guys have done a good job.

Let me clarify that. There are some that I wouldn't even classify because they're just rumor mongers. You obviously are trying to do the best job you can. You're also trying to improve a business I happen to love and you guys happen to love, too. So obviously we have something in common. That doesn't mean we can't agree to disagree, you know? Sometimes my kid says to me, "You're too much." I say to him, "If you think I'm too much, try being me 24 hours a day." Just because I don't agree with some of what you guys say, that doesn't mean I'm against ya's. If you guys happen to say, "Boy, hey, he went overboard." Well, maybe you're right. But maybe I didn't see it that way.

Keller: Philosophically, have you come to accept the critical and wide-open style of coverage newsletters like this one cover wrestling?

Sullivan: Let me tell you something. I watched Nick at Nite the other night, Superman, 1954. On the show, they said wrestling is all fake. At the end of the show, the guy who could really

wrestle, he said to Superman, "What a gimmick! Real wrestling!" You guys didn't create anything that a lot of people didn't know. There's some of it that I would say, even for you guys, I don't think you should know what the trick's going to be because you won't be as surprised and enjoy it as well. That's the only thing that I regret, that you guys sometimes see everything coming. You want to go see Fatal Attraction and I tell you the finish. You'll go see it and you'll enjoy it, but would you have enjoyed it more if I didn't tell you? I'm not saying don't tell everything. But I'd rather you let readers see it, then explain it.

Keller: How has that attitude changed within the business?

Sullivan: Everybody knocked them (the newsletters) that I knew, but they were calling them. I was always perceived as the troll that ate newsletter people under the bridge. I always admired them, but I didn't call them. Everybody else is knocking you guys but calling you every night. That's the difference now. We're more open. I think, in some respects, that's good. The only respect that I said is you don't see magicians showing you how the tiger appeared. Sometimes, I think if you see something coming and you say to yourself, "Boy, in four weeks, this is really going to turn the people's heads," maybe let them see it and tell them you saw it coming, but we wanted you to see the full impact as it happened. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong.

Keller: Would the wrestling industry be the same had these publications not been around?

Sullivan: They've had a lot of influence on the business. A lot of positive. They've been on a lot of people's asses that they should have been on, I think. I think they've been a watchdog of some sort. I think sometimes the business needs that. Sometimes I think you can become too critical of a person and maybe put something in there that really doesn't have anything to do with wrestling, but rather it's a personal thing and you get the wrong opinion of somebody. Once I read something about them and it was a personal thing, and when I got to know him, he told me the story without me ever bringing it up and I understood his situation. In fact, I would have done the exact same thing, probably worse. The story I read was right, but they didn't have his side. That happens rarely, but occasionally, it happens.

Keller: Do you read this as a trade journal which keeps you informed on the business you're in?

Sullivan: It's a trade journal. The only question I have is some of these guys that are put over have never drawn a \$100,000 house. Excuse me, maybe they haven't even drawn a \$50,000 house. So, my bottom line is put asses in seats, then you're a great performer. There was one guy I heard so much about one time and when I saw him, he had no facial expressions. He could do everything, but he had no facial expressions. And I said, "This guy could never draw you a dime." But he was the darling. I could understand why if you saw what he did why you would think that. But I read you guys now as a trade journal and everybody else does too. It's a shrinking world. If you don't become part of it, you're not going to be in it.

TERRY TAYLOR

Terry Taylor was voted one of the top heels of 1987 while with the UWF and has since entered and left the WWF. Terry entered the WWF at the same time as Curt Hennig. One of the two was pushed as one of the Federation's top heels and was dubbed "Mr. Perfect." The other ended up as a mid-card babyface dubbed "The Red Rooster." Terry Taylor, the latter of the two, left the WWF this summer and plans to revitalize his career in the NWA where his true talents and potential may be explored. In the following "Torch Talk" interview conducted on July 28, 1990, Taylor discusses his days in the WWF, his future plans, and his thoughts on wrestling in general.

Wade Keller: When did you get involved in pro wrestling?

Terry Taylor: My first match was September 28, 1979 in Homestead, Florida against Joe LeDuc.

Keller: Who trained you to be a wrestler?

Taylor: I didn't have a trainer. I had a tryout with Eddie Graham in August of 1979. It consisted of them beating me up two days in a row, showing me how to lock up, then I had a TV match against Bugsy McGraw.

Keller: For what promotions or areas have you worked?

Taylor: A lot of them. I worked for Florida for three months, then Knoxville, Tennessee for four months. then Atlanta, Georgia for World Championship Wrestling for six months. Then Kansas City for six months. Then to Charlotte for six months. Then I took six months off. Then I went back to Charlotte for six months. Then Tennessee for two years. Then Mid-South Sports for three years with Bill Watts.

Keller: Is it true that Ric Flair is one of your role models in the ring?

Taylor: Yeah, I admire Ric Flair a lot for his technique. Because we're almost the same body style and he does a lot of stuff against the bigger guys. He's had great success doing what he does.

Keller: What do you think of Hulk Hogan?

Taylor: A true gentleman, a class act, a great wrestler, and I am proud to call him a friend.

Keller: Bill Watts?

Taylor: A genius when it comes to professional wrestling. He pioneered an organization that I think would have done very, very well if it hadn't been bought out by Jim Crockett who just figured by ruining the UWF it would make the NWA look better. So he sacrificed us to make his group look better.

Keller: Are you bitter over the way Jim Crockett, Dusty Rhodes, and the entire NWA hierarchy treated the UWF?

Taylor: Yes... No, I'm not bitter. I just think

given different circumstances people would have been given good competition between the two organizations if they would have let them continue separately. But they decided they were going to combine them sooner or later, and that was their way doing it.

Keller: What do you think of Eddie Gilbert?

Taylor: A good guy. A guy who is very talented in a lot of ways. He is very creative in our sport. He is a small guy that has been very successful in a big man's business. I consider him a good friend.

Keller: Ted DiBiase?

Taylor: A fantastic technical wrestler. A good person who's doing very, very well and I'm happy for his success.

Keller: Ric Flair?

Taylor: Probably the greatest wrestler of the '80s. He's done it all, in and out of the ring, as he'll tell you. He is a class act in and out of the ring. And hopefully the '90s will be the decade for Terry Taylor.

Keller: Sting?

Taylor: A very good friend. I'm happy for his success. He's a very talented guy. He's an innovator in the ring. He's got phenomenal athletic ability that he's translated into professional wrestling style.

Keller: Ultimate Warrior?

Taylor: A very, very hard worker. A guy who is not the most gifted athlete in the world, but he's got a fabulous body and a good work ethic. He tries very hard to be good at what he does.



Terry Taylor

My goals have changed a lot because of the reality thing. I thought when I started when I was 24 years old that I was going to be the world's champion. All sorts of disappointments. I've just become more realistic in my goals. This is a new awakening for me, or a new chance, because that Red Rooster thing, I feel, set me back two years.

Keller: Jim Ross.

Taylor: Probably the best commentator in our sport right now. He's very knowledgeable. If he doesn't talk too much. I think he needs a little help from the color side.

Keller: Pat Patterson?

Taylor: Personally, I like Pat Patterson a lot. I feel he's doing a good job at the WWF. I think he's second in command, way behind Vince McMahon. Answers to Vince and gets a lot of flack from the wrestlers for Vince. He's a good guy, but he's got a tough job.

Keller: Jerry Lawler.

Taylor: I haven't seen him in a long time. I admire his ability. He's very creative. He's a talented guy as far as art. A great talker. A fabulous wrestler, to boot.

Keller: Do you think steroids are a major problem in the WWF and pro wrestling in general?

Taylor: Honestly, yeah. There was a time that a guy my size, 6-1, 235 was a big guy and athletic ability meant something in the ring. Now since about 1984, if your muscles haven't been steroided up and you can't wrestle, but you look good, they'll give you music and paint your face up and you're a wrestler. I think the people are starting to see that because as soon as the music is over, so is the match.

Keller: Do you think the wrestlers using steroids realize what the consequences could be ten, fifteen years down the line?

Taylor: To be perfectly honest, anyone who takes them in our sport, getting beat up and banged around is part of it, so for somebody to say don't take steroids because they're bad for ya', get backdropped a hundred times, that's not good for ya' either. If it's the difference of making 200,000 dollars a year or a half million, it would be very hard to say, "No, I wouldn't do it." Honestly.

Keller: Were you a fan of wrestling while growing up?

Taylor: Very much so. I grew up in Florida watching Jack Brisco and Dory Funk Jr.

Keller: Do you have a most embarrassing moment in wrestling?

Taylor: Yeah, walking out as the Red Rooster. A lot of people knew me as Terry Taylor and they introduced me as the Little Red Rooster. That was really tough.

Keller: Who do you admire in the business?

Taylor: Honestly, my favorite wrestler to watch is Bobby Eaton. He's a fabulous talent. I like to watch Flair. Randy Savage does some neat stuff. I like stuff that guys do that I can't do. I go, "Wow, look at that. I wish I could do that." The Japanese guys can do some incredible stuff. They've got this guy, Kobashi, who's 6-2, and 260 and can do that backflip moonsault front flip into a splash. He can do almost anything. He's incredible. He's 23 and I hate him (laughs).

Keller: What is your most memorable match?

Taylor: Against Ric Flair at the Superdome. We went 48 minutes and he ended up beating me. And I figure hanging with the world champion for almost a whole hour for a guy who didn't have a father in the sport or any connections, I felt that was a pretty good accomplishment. No classes, no schooling. Just me and him going at it for 48 minutes. I felt that was my best match.

Keller: So far what is the favorite era of your career?

Taylor: I really feel lucky because I've had a good career so far and it's not over by any stretch of the imagination. But I've had a great time when I was in Tennessee working for Jerry Jarrett. I was there with The Rock & Roll Express and Jerry Lawler. We had a real array of talent and I was the champ. Working for Bill Watts, I was the champion for him. I was the first guy to be his Southern Champion and Television Champion. I liked Tennessee a lot, but my favorite time wrestling was Mid-South and the UWF. I think that is Terry Taylor.

Keller: When you went to the WWF did you know you would be saddled with the "Red Rooster" gimmick?

Taylor: (laughs) Absolutely not. I really didn't like the idea, but sometimes you had to, at 6-1, 235, in a business of giants and characters. They said that it could help my career, that they could promote it and make me a success, if not in the wrestling part, maybe the promotion part. The first year they promoted it pretty well and I was all right, but I was never comfortable with it. Then all of a sudden they quit promoting it. Either I made someone mad or something happened.

Keller: Did the WWF ever give the impression that you would be relieved of the gimmick?

Taylor: I never had the choice. I think once I was saddled with that gimmick, that was it for

the duration of my stay there. They do change some people's but I honestly felt they liked it. The kids liked it and stuff like that, but I just felt like it wasn't me and it's very hard to be something you're not.

Keller: Would you be more comfortable being in a role more toward a Buddy Landel or similar to the one we saw in the UWF right after you turned on Chris Adams and aligned yourself with Eddie Gilbert?

Taylor: I don't think it was much like Landel. I can do that. I just feel like if (the NWA) needs a shortstop, I can play that. If they need a catcher, I can do that.

Keller: In the WWF were there promises made that were not kept?

Taylor: They never promised me anything. I asked them to come in. Then, to be perfectly honest and fair toward that promotion, I asked them to hire me. I figured if I showed initiative and hard work it would pay off. They used me the way they felt it would be best for the promotion. The disagreement was the way I felt I should be used and the way they were using me.

Keller: Did you get the feeling with other wrestlers that most were happy or unhappy or was there a variety of attitudes in the WWF?

Taylor: In our sport, I think everybody feels they should be used better or differently or promoted more or get more TV time. Very few guys are happy with the way things are. But I think it's a competitive business and that's why. Everybody wants to be the top guy.

Keller: Did you receive any heat from fellow wrestlers who had known you before, or did most people understand the circumstances and sympathize?

Taylor: Both. In our sport, everybody makes fun of everybody. It's kind of a brotherhood and also a competitive thing. We want everyone to do well, but not as well as us and not better than us. So after I got the Red Rooster thing, after being the fair-haired boy, a lot of people were like that.

Keller: How was your recent tour wrestling in Japan?

Taylor: I just got back from Japan four hours ago. I did real well with Baba's All Japan. They liked my work and my work ethic.

Keller: How do you compare the Japanese style to American?

Taylor: It's different. In Japan, they work really hard. The whole Japanese culture just works hard. The lady who cleans the room in the hotel gets on her hands and knees and scrubs the floor. The work ethic for the Japanese wrestlers is the same. They get in the ring and they go.

Keller: Do you enjoy the culture in Japan during your off-hours?

Taylor: We travel so much. If we were at a hotel or something, I tried to find a gym. There were very few American gyms. I try to work out with weights. For me, I usually have to diet, but I had trouble keeping weight on because we worked so hard and the diet was so different. Lots

To be perfectly honest, anyone who takes them in our sport, getting beat up and banged around is part of it, so for somebody to say don't take steroids because they're bad for ya', get backdropped a hundred times, that's not good for ya' either. If it's the difference of making 200,000 dollars a year or a half million, it would be very hard to say, "No, I wouldn't do it." Honestly.

of... well, whatever it is that the Japanese eat.

Keller: What are your long term goals in pro wrestling?

Taylor: Well, I've been in the sport for ten years. My goals have changed a lot because of the reality thing. I thought when I started, I was 24 years old, that I was going to be the world's champion. All sorts of disappointments. They happen to everybody. I've just become more realistic in my goals. This is a new awakening for me, or a new chance, because that Red Rooster thing, I feel, set me back two years. A lot of people who don't watch Titan Sports are going to remember Terry Taylor and I think a whole new bunch of people are going to see a new Terry Taylor because I like what I do. I want to do what I do best, whether it's for the independent promotions or the Japanese, the NWA, or wherever I decide to go, they're going to see me do what I do best.

Keller: How much longer would you like to wrestle?

Taylor: I still enjoy it, especially after going to Japan because they do my style. There are so few characters there. The only one I can think of is Big Van Vader.

Keller: And Jushin Liger from New Japan?

Taylor: I don't know him. This was my first trip there and I was just trying to get to the bus on time. They offered for me to go before but I was making more money in the States.

Keller: Were you aware of their style before the tour?

Taylor: I have about 24 hours on tape of Japanese wrestling, like Stan Hansen against Terry Funk and Dynamite Kid vs. Tiger Mask. I had a pretty good feel for what was going on, but it's different now than it was when those tapes were

made.

Keller: What do you think of NWA booker Ole Anderson?

Taylor: I like Ole. I think he's a smart guy as far as wrestling goes and I think he's the strong hand the NWA needs for direction. He reminds me a lot of my father, not that he's that old. My father says horrible things to people, and as soon as he says it, he's done. A lot of people get offended, but I understand it, I don't get offended. When he yells at you, he doesn't mean anything. That's his way of saying how he feels.

Keller: Do you have any idea what you want to do after your wrestling career is over?

Taylor: What I'd really like to do is be in sports broadcasting. Yeah, a lot of what we do on wrestling is television interviews which we have to ad-lib. If I had a chance to interview people or do something on television, I'd do that.

Keller: Were WWF interviews scripted?

Taylor: The one's I did were ad-lib. The only ones that I did that were scripted were on NBC's Saturday Night's Main Events. They had a team of writers. They had what they wanted said. We had cue cards and you could see the guys reading them.

Keller: Would you ever like to return to the WWF under better conditions or is the WWF part of your past?

Taylor: I would go back, but not as The Red Rooster. But they might not want me back. I think they take it personally when somebody leaves.

Keller: Under what circumstances did you leave the WWF?

Taylor: Yeah, I just said I'd like to finish up after Wrestlemania. Because they have a long break there, I would actually be giving a nine week notice, which is more than fair. If I were to get a notice, it would have been for two weeks. We finished up and then I asked them to release me from my contract and they said no. They were nice enough to hire me back and just said you can work here until your contract is up and that way you can make a living. They were very fair about it. The contract is up August 30. Then I am booked on the NWA Clash, the show September 5. I would very much like to go to work there, but we just have to work things out.

Keller: Do you think the Red Rooster character will be held against you in contract negotiations?

Taylor: No. They've made it very clear that they've put that in the past, that it was unfortunate. There is so much going on in wrestling that the people forget. Hopefully they'll forget that and move forward. In Japan, not one person said anything about it and they're avid wrestling fans. Every Thursday three new wrestling magazines come out and I was in every one of them. They said good stuff about me from what was translated.

I still enjoy wrestling. I enjoy the pure form of it. I feel it's been changed and messed around a little bit. Maybe the NWA is going to redeem a little of what I feel this sport has to offer. More than using gimmicks and flashing lights. I guess you have to do what is successful.

TERRY TAYLOR

The following a "Torch Talk" series with current WWF wrestler "Terrific" Terry Taylor. The interview was conducted with Taylor between being released from WCW and being hired by the WWF. In this segment, Taylor talks about the positives and negatives of working for the WWF based on his stint with them a couple years ago. Taylor also makes some recommendations about what he would do to improve the current wrestling scene. The interview was conducted in September of 1992.

Wade Keller: With what emotions do you look back on your most recent stint with WCW?

Terry Taylor: To be honest, I was a lot more bitter about it a while ago. I just felt like anybody else in the real world, if you do what you're told and are a good employee and just try to represent the company in the best way, you will be rewarded. I missed four matches in four years and did everything I was told to do to the best of my ability. New management came in and felt it would be better if I took off a year which didn't help me feed my family. It was beyond circumstances I could control. But there were other people out there that wanted to hire me.

Keller: How did WCW tell you they no longer wanted your services?

Taylor: I had a 30 day rollover clause. One day before the contract would have rolled over, I got a certified letter that said they wanted to discuss my contract. I wanted to get a meeting with Bill Watts to find out how I fit in with his plans, but I couldn't get a meeting, couldn't get a meeting, and couldn't get a meeting. Ten days after I tried to get a meeting and no one would take my call, Magnum picked up the phone at 5:30 after I left a message on Dusty's voice mail and Magnum said they did not plan to renew me.

Keller: What did Watts say to you?

Taylor: He told me I wasn't fired. I had never been fired in the 12 years I had been in wrestling. I asked him to tell me what I had done and on what he based my release. He said I wasn't fired, I just wasn't renewed. He said they were not going to renew anyone's contract on a weekly or yearly deal. He said the way I was used on television, I had to be out of WCW for a year.

Keller: After that were you assuming you could get a position in WCW one year later?

Taylor: The wrestling business is built on deception. We deceive the people, the promotion deceives us, and on and on and on. It would be nice to say in one year I would have a position open for me. Who's to say Dusty or Watts will be around in a year?

Keller: In retrospect, would you have done anything differently—or could you have done anything differently—to make your stay with WCW go better?

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Taylor: If I would have known there was going to be a two year time limit on my employment with Turner, I don't think I would have bought a house. I moved my family out here and I took my son out of school and took my wife out of the first home she had all to come work for WCW. I wouldn't have done that. Working-wise I would have done the exact same thing.

Keller: Does that situation reflect a bigger problem in professional wrestling for a lot of wrestlers who don't have a chance to ever feel very secure with their jobs? And is there anything that could be done to add to security of wrestlers?

Taylor: I don't think you'll see it in our lifetime. When Turner began to give out guaranteed contracts, I thought that was the beginning of the whole way wrestlers did business changing, where the company would take care of the wrestlers and pay them when they were injured. Now Turner believes that is costing them too much money and they're going to do things differently. Where do you put a dollar sign on making your wrestlers happy and making their families secure and making them want to work for you. I honestly thought that times had changed, but I guess they haven't yet.

Keller: If you were in WCW management, how would you run things differently?

Taylor: For me—it would be really easy to say because I'm not the one doing it—but I would have some of the top names booked at least for a year with guaranteed money. I would want them happy, I would want them not worried about providing for their families. If they could work out a two year deal, it would depend on who the wrestler was. I think I would tell guys when they came in, like Vince McMahon Sr. used to do, he'd give guys a starting date and finishing date. That way the guy knew he had that many weeks or that many years to wrestle for that company. I think I could do that for the middle to underneath talent. I

think it takes at least a year to get a decent babyface over. The same goes for a heel. It's just an investment in the future. I wouldn't shoot angles week to week, either. I would do that differently.

Keller: What do you mean by that?

Taylor: I think the WWF spends more time planning ahead. They're booked two or three months in advance. I found that out trying to get booked. WCW to me, there's no follow-through on some of the things they've done. I'm not saying I could do it better, but I think you make a choice. You're either going to go with something or you're not.

Keller: How would you work into guaranteed contracts medical coverage, medical insurance, and pay while injured? Or do wrestlers earn enough so that's the risk they have to take?

Taylor: Well, being a wrestler, it's pretty tough for me to say that wrestlers get paid enough and that they're covered well enough. I think a guy who's on a contract, if the office knows he's going to be in the company a year, I don't think it's that tough. Under the guaranteed contracts in WCW, if you get hurt in the ring, they fix you and pay you. Vince says that also, he won't have it fixed unless the commission does it. Most of the wrestlers have their own health insurance. If it was me and you had somebody who was on a guaranteed deal, I don't see why medical benefits wouldn't be possible. They're doing that in both places. Vince signs you up for two years and doesn't guarantee you any money. WCW, from what I understand, I don't work there anymore, but from what I hear, they want guys on four month contracts. To me it's kind of hard to plan your life around a four month increment of employment. It's just tough.

Keller: Do you think the lack of job security in WCW hurts wrestlers' performance?

Taylor: Please remember that I am no longer with the company so everything I say may sound like sour grapes, but from what I understand being an outsider, morale is low with the wrestlers and in the office, it seems you may be out just because you may not perform well once or twice. The security was nice because it felt like the company wanted us and we were part of something.

Keller: Do you think the promoters possess all of the power?

Taylor: Absolutely. When there's only two games in town and there's all these different wrestlers that want work and need work, it's brutal as far as the wrestlers because the supply of wrestlers is so much greater than the demand. I'm not saying good wrestlers. There are some guys that are really good that are out of work. And there are some guys who aren't good at all who are being used. And I think that's reflected in both companies' products. I'm not putting myself in there, but I think I'm as good as half the wrestlers in both of the major companies.

Keller: When you look back, do you see anything that you did that put you on a career track that did not fully take advantage of your skills?

Taylor: A year ago Jim Herd was still running

the company and they were getting ready to cut down from two towns per night to one town per night which meant a lot of guys on daily deals would not be working much. Once I got that deal, Dusty Rhodes felt no matter what that I was going to do anything he asked. And I did because I always put the company first. Sometimes the guys that put themselves first get used better. I guess it's kind of like the guy who treats the girl bad, the girl still wants him. It seems that's the way it is with wrestlers and promoters. It just seems that the guys that do what they're told, like Bobby Eaton, Arn Anderson, and myself get beat on television, used badly, and abused. They say our ability to work will carry us. Well, if we're that good when we get beat, imagine how over we would be if we won once in a while. I just feel that Dusty Rhodes misused me. A year ago I wouldn't have been able to say that. I don't think he could do anymore to me, whether he is my boss in the future or not.

Keller: Do you think people in power in wrestling deliberately misuse talent to the detriment of the company to fulfill personal grudges?

Taylor: Dusty's been around 20 years. I think that a guy who's been around 20 years would know how to use talent and would be able to recognize it when he saw it. I have to think it's a personality thing. They're in an unchecked power position. They answer to no one and a lot of times they just do what they want. That's not always good for the business. It certainly isn't good for the wrestlers sometimes.

Keller: What were your dreams when you entered the business concerning how far you would go in the business?

Taylor: When I was young and impressionable, I really didn't know anything other than I liked what I was doing. I wasn't making any money. I was making \$300 a week, but that was more than I had ever seen. People were cheering me. It seems the biggest success I've ever had was as a babyface. I think I'm a good heel, but I never had a chance except when Eddie Gilbert booked the UWF. But when I first started out, I saw all these other guys doing what I was doing. They were all really good, so I just studied what they did. After a while, I thought I could be as good as they wanted me to be and I honestly thought I would be World Champion someday. It wasn't that I was a great amateur wrestler, that I was a great athlete, or a big guy. I just made myself good at what we do.

Keller: Who were some of the people you patterned yourself after?

Taylor: When I first started, I thought Steve Keirn had a good style. He was about my size. I just thought he was fun to watch. He did goofy, funny things sometimes, and when it came time to sell and be serious, he could do that. When I first started, it was he and Terry Funk that I really liked watching. Then Eddie Graham got in the ring a couple times and showed me a few things. I had never had a lesson until Eddie Graham showed me how to do a headlock, lock-up, and armdrag. Nobody ever showed me how to do that. Everything I knew how to do, I just watched. Considering I didn't have a dad in the business, I'm not six-foot-ten, 400 pounds, and I didn't have any friends in the

business, just to get in the business was fortunate.

Keller: At what point did you realize that maybe World Championships weren't in your future?

Taylor: My dream kind of got faded when I went to New York. My whole idea of the wrestling business was completely changed. I'm not saying it was wrong. But I went from Terry Taylor, the young babyface, to being the Red Rooster. I'm not saying that's right or wrong, but I don't think there's ever going to be a World Champion named "The Red Rooster" in any group. So I think I was relegated to middle and underneath spots because of that gimmick, which is okay... No, it isn't okay, I wanted to do better. A lot of times when you're given a certain character, it limits what you can do. I didn't want to be limited. Then, when I came back to WCW, when Ole was booking, I was starting to get used pretty good. I thought things might turn around because I was hanging around with Flair, Arn, Bobby, a lot of the top heels. When Dusty came in, it got worse and worse.

Keller: Is it tough to remain optimistic?

Taylor: I always try to be an optimist and think that hard work will be rewarded and the politics will be removed and someone who works hard and is reliable and a credit to the business will be rewarded. I bought 12 suits at \$300 each of my own money for the Taylor Made gimmick. The company never paid me back. These tuxedos I bought cost me \$1,500 each and I thought somebody would recognize I had a good attitude. I missed four matches in two years, all at once after a knee surgery. I came back six days after having cartilage removed from my knee. I get back to get beat by Rick Rude on television. My reward for coming back early was doing a job on TV for the top heel when I was a heel. When does one draw the line between "I work for TBS and will do anything they say," and "When is TBS going to do something for me?"

Keller: Were there enough avenues for wrestlers to show their concerns, thoughts, suggestions, and complaints?

Taylor: Right now with Bill, he knows what he wants. He knows in what direction he wants to go. From what I saw before I was gone, I don't think he cared about what the wrestlers feel. Maybe that's the best way for them to be. Since this business is a work, if it was a shoot, the Steiners and Doctor Death would be the only three in it, so how do you gauge someone's talent in something that's not a legitimate contest? How do you draw if the promoters don't let you? If I got the push Dustin Rhodes got, things would be completely different than they are now. I'm not blaming Dustin, whatsoever, because I think he's very deserving. He's going to be great. Look at Van Hammer. He got shoved down the people's throats at my expense and he still hasn't panned out. He just wasn't ready. It wasn't his fault.

Keller: A lot of people look back at the Red Rooster days and say you put yourself in a bad position by accepting a low-level gimmick, thus no one should feel bad for you. How do you respond?

Taylor: When I went up to New York, I didn't

know anything about the way they were doing things. All I knew is when I went up there, I made in four days, \$4,800. I had been unemployed for nine months. I thought I had died and went to Heaven. I figured being first match on the card making almost five thousand dollars in four days, I thought the world was a beautiful place. Then they told me they wanted to do this character. I didn't know anything about it. I thought if I made \$4,800 in four days just being Terry Taylor without a gimmick and no push, imagine what is going to happen if I do what they say. And they gave me a little push. The thing with Bobby Heenan, that was January 1990, and people still to this day are talking about me beating up Bobby Heenan. People are still calling me Red Rooster. So if you go by notoriety and recognition, they knew something I didn't. Vince told me, "Hey, you're six-feet, there's nothing outstanding about Terry Taylor. You can work, but up here everyone can work."

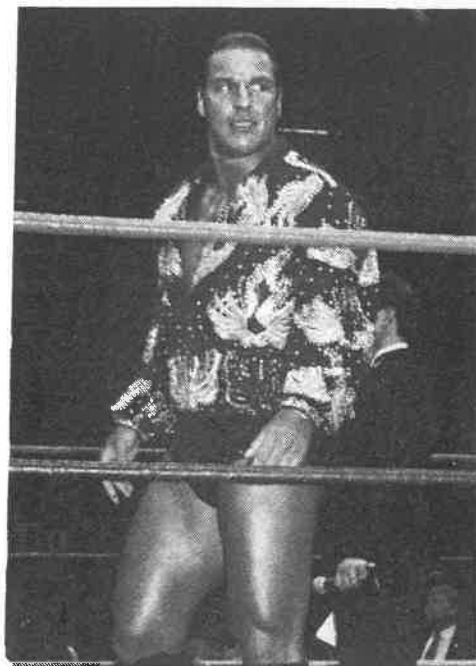
Keller: What was it about the WWF that made them stand out differently from WCW and the other promotions you have worked for?

Taylor: The WWF is light years ahead of everybody else in a lot of ways. They are very, very organized. There is nothing that ever goes wrong where somebody doesn't know why.

They rarely make mistakes. If they're going to give somebody a character that they want to push, they don't spare expense. When I was there and they were first pushing Ted DiBiase, they had the babyface taking money away from Ted and handing it out to fans. They were giving away seven and eight hundred dollars a night. I don't see WCW doing that. The way they are trying to save money and cut back expenses, if you told them you wanted to give away \$800 in every major market for the next two months, they'd have a heart attack. They gave Teddy all that video time, limousines, and all these different things just to get his character over. I just don't see character development in WCW. New York knows where they're going with a guy when they get him. When they hire a guy and they have a character for him, they know how far they're going to go with him. If the guy really takes off, then they'll give it some more. They don't spare expenses. They do things professionally from top to bottom. I think that's the difference.

Keller: Are there any negatives about the way they run the business, such as wrestlers being treated like robots instead of people due to the methodical travel and scheduling?

Taylor: I don't think that's a problem. I became a WWF zombie because what they do is they make you work the way they want you to, which is good because they know where they're going, the ins and outs, the direction they're going to go with somebody. Just because you have to do a job here or you have to do something there, they know where they're going with it, so the wrestler who panics doesn't necessarily have to. If I did a job there, I'd panic, but then a couple weeks later somebody I didn't expect put me over. They treat you well, too. They care about you. I had a legal problem and Vince loaned me ten grand the second week I was there. I paid him back a week later, but he did it and he didn't even know me... They don't



Terry Taylor

have any pressure. When my son was born, they sent a baby rattle and a card. Both Pat Patterson and Vince sent me Christmas cards each year. They still send me royalty checks. They're a classy organization. When I quit in '90, I still thought I was going to be World Champion. Maybe my ego got in the way. It was tough for me back then when I thought I could do better.

Keller: Are there any negatives?

Taylor: I'm kind of spoiled because of the guarantee thing. I never made less than \$300 a night there. There was a lot of travel. I was gone a lot. Being with WCW, I could be home 15 nights a month which was nice, I have a four year old son.

Keller: In the WWF did you usually work about ten days in a row?

Taylor: I worked 17 in a row one time in Nova Scotia and it was brutal.

Keller: What were the average number of days in a row?

Taylor: The idea was supposed to be ten days on, three off, five on, three off. So the first ten days of the month you'd be gone. The second eleven days you'd be home for six of them... And you'd appreciate your family more because you didn't get to see them as much.

Keller: When you are on the road for the longer stretches, what would you do besides travel, sleep, eat, and wrestle?

Taylor: Train. That's it.

Keller: Would the wrestlers go out and see the town, see the culture, catch a movie?

Taylor: No. You drank like hell the night after the matches. They usually put you on an early flight, that way it was a cheaper fair and you get to the town on time. There were times I'd go to bed at two in the morning and have to catch a 7 a.m. flight. Then you sleep on the plane, get to your hotel, check in, eat, work out, and go to the town.

There's not a lot of wasted time.

Keller: Would you like to work for the WWF in Europe?

Taylor: If the WWF does what I think they can in Europe—if Wembley is any indication—I think it would be very lucrative now. If you're going to work, why not make as much money as possible. Maybe the WWF will be great over there and that will give the States a chance to recoup.

Keller: Is it better for some people who can live on a smaller amount of money to work independently and set their own dates and live a normal life?

Taylor: Yeah. I need one or two more good years before I can afford to wrestle for less money. I'm working on retiring as far as getting my stuff paid off. If I get two more years, I can do that. Then the idea of wrestling in a small area would appeal to me because I wouldn't need the money and I could be home more... A lot of people are in pro wrestling for money. I like money. But I also like being happy. For the past year and half in WCW, I wasn't happy. I was getting beat and working my ass off to make other guys look good who didn't know how to look good. I made more money in my last 12 months with WCW than any other time in my career and my wife says she's never seen me more miserable. There is a lot to be said for making money. There's a lot to be said for being happy. At my age, I'm looking to be a little happier than rich, because I've made a lot of money. After seeing the hurricanes blast through Hawaii and Louisiana and Florida, these people without houses and without insurance living in a tent, not having a job is not that big of a deal.

Keller: If you do get a couple more solid years, what do you want to do after that?

Taylor: There are two things I am very interested in doing and I may be able to do them both. I went to visit my father tonight and we talked about maybe opening a gym. He is thinking about retiring. He's a baby doctor. I'm 37 and he's 64. He's still about my best friend in the whole world. I think he legitimately wants to get into a business that I can run which he can make some money from. His investments are earning like 2 to 5 percent, so his deal of living off the investments is not happening right now. I would like to own a gym, but I don't want to get into debt and fail. So I might do that or I might go to chiropractor college. I crack everyone in the locker room right now. I might as well get paid for it.

Keller: You've talked about wanting to get into broadcasting.

Taylor: It doesn't seem like it's going to happen. Jim Ross is great at what he does. I've seen him make matches exciting when the wrestlers aren't doing anything. Now he's with the Falcons. He's had a chance to break off and do something else. If I got a chance to announce WCW, maybe somebody would see me and want me to do something else.

Keller: If Kip Frey had not been reassigned in TBS, do you think he would have been an effective leader for WCW?

Taylor: Yes. I don't think he knew a whole lot

about the wrestling business, but he was trying to surround himself with people who did and I think he was smart enough to see through some of the stuff that was thrown at him. It took him a while to adjust coming from entertainment law. He was starting to treat the wrestlers like they were important. He maybe made a few wrong decisions, but I think he was moving in the right direction. We're all going to make a few wrong decisions trying to do something right. Considering he didn't have any background in it, what he was doing was giving the wrestlers guaranteed money and security so the guys didn't have to worry about providing for themselves and their families. They only had to worry about going out to the ring and providing the people with the best possible product for their money. Morale was really high. Everyone wanted to work here. I think there was a big waiting list to get in here and because he made the wrestlers seem like he wanted them to be there. Attitude is important as far as your employees. I don't work for WCW now, but from what I understand, morale isn't what it should be.

Keller: If you are in the V.P. position in WCW, why should you care about morale?

Taylor: I think it's true of any profession that a happy employee is a productive employee. I was watching a thing on school kids tonight on television. They were saying a happy kid is a kid who will learn. When they say the guys on guaranteed contracts didn't work hard and all that, I don't think that's true. Most of the guys in WCW worked their butts off because they knew they were getting guarantees. The thing they say now is that guys work harder when the houses are down in order to get them up. As big as the company is, no matter how hard you work, it isn't going to come up.

Keller: Is there a balance between high morale and paying excessive amounts of money to wrestlers when the division isn't making money? Is that justifiable?

Taylor: Who says the company's not making money. I never heard a promoter admit he was making money. I've been in the wrestling business 12 years and I've never heard a promoter say, "Gee, I had a great year last year." They always lost money or could have done better or paid the wrestlers too much. I don't understand everything. I'm a wrestler, I'm not an office guy. I've done all that, but on a lesser scale. From what I see, Turner is a television company. He wants seven hours of wrestling so he will have 12 minutes every hour of advertising to sell. I don't know the math on that, but if he's selling all that advertising, he's making his money. From what I understand, and I may be wrong, WCW is just making money off their house shows. If that is the case, yeah, WCW is losing money, but Turner Home Entertainment makes a bundle. So if the wrestlers are part of the television thing and part of Turner Home Entertainment and are part of the pay-per-views, if you put all that together and they're still losing money, then fix it.

Keller: Do you think a promoter who found success in the '70s or even the '80s and all of a sudden appears in 1992 would have a hard time adjusting away from the tactics of the past—intimidate the wrestlers, act all-powerful,

make your money and pay them as little as possible—do you see them having a hard time adjusting to the realities and ethics of the corporate world?

Taylor: I think anybody who's been out of touch for ten or fifteen years is still going to be out of touch. WCW is doing what they think they need to do to draw. Then I see the boss is over in Japan saying, "Gee wiz, look at all these Japanese people looking at all these high spots." Well, maybe the Japanese know something we don't. It's exciting to watch. I mean, they have 14 wrestling companies in one city and they all do well. We have two in the entire country and they're all floundering. Maybe we ought to take a look and make some changes.

Keller: What are some of the key things that the top promoters in this country, especially WCW being the number two company, need to do to turn things around? What does your gut tell you should be done?

Taylor: Well, that's a pretty loaded question for a guy that doesn't have a job. To me, the old philosophy still stands. Angles will work with guys who are over. From what I see, nobody's over. I think that the babyfaces are not hot. I don't think the heels have any heat. A lot of times the heat isn't gotten in a wrestling match. There's a lot of ways to get heat on heels where they don't even have to touch anybody. Interviews, videos, anything. Fans hated Ted DiBiase in the WWF before he even stepped in the ring. He made the kids get out of a pool. He was going to pay a kid \$100 to dribble a basketball and he kicked the ball while the kid was dribbling. What's that got to do with wrestling? Nothing. To me, they've got to get the personalities over because they're doing some good angles, but the people don't care because they don't care about the guys doing it.

Keller: How about some other things you'd do differently?

Taylor: If it was me, and it probably never will be, but if they said, "Terry, we want you to turn WCW around," the first thing I would do is explain to the guys that first I'm going to try to get some guys over. We're not going to do angles for a while. I'm going to tell Turner Home Entertainment that we're not going to run any angle until we get some guys over and it may take six months. I would try to do things to develop everyone's character. If Ron Simmons is "The All-American," you have to figure out what it is that makes him the All-American and go for it, show him as the people's champion. If Jake's the number one heel, make him the number one heel. Have Rude steal some guy's wife. Then when the heels are starting to get some heat and the babyfaces are over, then plant the seed where it looks like both the top babyface and heel are climbing a hill and they can't see each other yet, but sooner or later at the top of the hill they're going to get it on. That way the people are going to anticipate it. Once things get going good, once you start getting the characters over, once people start getting excited, the people see the build-up, then don't give the people the blowoff in the first match. Tease them on television and make them pay to be happy. It used to work. I don't know if it will work now. But that's what I would do.

Keller: What about the wrestling style? Would you pattern yourself after the Japanese style?

Taylor: Damn right I would. Have guys who can work executing moves that are hot. They have guys who can work and like to work.

Keller: What about the argument that there is a different culture, a different audience, and a different history, thus the style may not be compatible in the United States? Does wrestling need to be more conservative with fewer highspots in this country?

Taylor: That's probably true to a point. When I was over in New Japan, the smaller guys, the younger guys were doing all these spots I was afraid to watch. Then you've got Scott Norton and Bam Bam Bigelow and they do the American style and it gets over just as well. Rick Rude had matches over there with Masa Chono that rivaled Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat matches. They went 25 or 30 minutes and after 15 minutes, I went, "Geez, this is great!" I think it would get over as well here as it did over there." It was just good wrestling and the people over there appreciated it. What they have over there are great workers, that's the difference. We've got guys that go to a wrestling school on steroids, bleach their hair out, buy a prop, and they're figured in. Those guys over there, there's hundreds that try out and the top ten or twelve get a chance to be wrestlers. Then they spend three years training. The promotions invest three years of training in these guys because they believe in them. Over in the States, they don't do that. Over in the States, if you're good enough to produce, they want you, but there's nowhere to get that experience. In Japan, they cultivate young talent. They teach it, they nurture it, they feed it, then the reward is, for the next 10 to 12 to 20 years, they have wrestlers that will draw them millions of dollars. They invest and reap the rewards from their investments. No where in the States is that happening.

Keller: Let's briefly go back to the days of Jim Herd. People seem fascinated by him. How would you describe him in retrospect?

Taylor: He wasn't as bad as everybody thought, was he? When I got here, everybody said he was gruff and abrasive. I always got along with him well. He treated me fairly, he always heard me out. He always had time for me. A lot of guys said they couldn't talk to him, but I never found him that way. There was one time he was stressed out about something, but he said, "Jesus Christ, I don't have time! Dammit! Leave me alone!" That was just his way, but that was only once. Otherwise I found him very engaging. From what I understand, he was a great administrator, he just had trouble dealing with the wrestling personalities. Anybody who's not in this business would have trouble with wrestling personalities. Looking back on things, as far as the wrestlers go and the way the company is going, he wasn't so bad after all.

Keller: Where do you think WCW would be right now if Herd had stayed on?

Taylor: I don't know. What's different? They're still not drawing. Everything's changed as far as the office goes, but as far as the product goes, it might be a little better, but the people still aren't paying to see it. They're not turning their

televisions on.

Keller: What do you think of Watts so far?

Taylor: I used to consider Bill a good friend and a close friend. He taught me a lot about the wrestling business when I worked for him from '84 to '87. Some of the lessons were really hard emotionally. He makes you pay to learn. He fined me for saying things, he talked down to me. But it was always a teaching thing. When he came here, I don't know, he told everyone that they had a fresh start, but I don't think that was the thing for me. It was two weeks after he was hired that I got my notice, so what did I do in two weeks to show what I could do or not do? He knew I was abused and saw it. I called him about once a month for the two years I was here telling him that if I thought anybody could straighten things out, he could do it. Then when he came, Whack!, I was the first one to go.

Keller: Do you respect him more in some respects in that he didn't let friendship stand in the way of what he thought was a good business decision?

Taylor: If that was the case, yeah. But seeing the way that things are, maybe I'm blowing my own horn, but if he wants to get back to what worked in the Mid-South, five of the most depressed states in the United States where he drew millions of dollars in the three years, we were there. If it worked back then, maybe it would work now. All they had to do was turn me babyface. They didn't need to fire me. That's my opinion... I thought if anyone would know what my potential was, it would be him. And if anyone could tap it, it would be him... I made it very clear I didn't want to leave. I said I would teach at the wrestling school. He said no. There were a lot of things I wanted to do and I could stay off television. That's the main thing he said was wrong, how I was used on television. My reward for doing all the jobs I was asked to do was lose my job. It was a sobering experience. I thought I would at least have the opportunity to show what I could do before I was fired.

Keller: Given your past relations with Bill Watts, what do you think are some of the things he does that people might misunderstand?

Taylor: Now, I don't know because we've only spoken for three minutes and that was when we were talking about my career. He was fair about it. He said, "Terry, the way you've been used on television for the last couple of years, you've got to go. You've got to get out of here and get fresh again." Well, whose fault is that? I did what I was told. I mean, the same booker is there. Bill's got to work with him. I understand that. What was the question, again?

Keller: Misunderstanding...

Taylor: Oh yeah. He'll talk down to a wrestler like the wrestler is stupid because Bill just has his way. The way he talks to people, if you don't have a pretty good self-image—and most wrestlers don't, they act like they're full of themselves, but they're usually pretty insecure—so if you don't know how to take him, he can make you feel horrible about yourself. That's just Bill's way of teaching. His lessons are not the type that you

All they had to do was turn me babyface. They didn't need to fire me. That's my opinion... I thought if anyone would know what my potential was, it would be Bill Watts. And if anyone could tap it, it would be him. I made it very clear I didn't want to leave. I said I would teach at the wrestling school.

forget, like if you threw a punch that missed, he'd club you and say, "I didn't miss that, did I?" You learned. He's a real good teacher. The bad thing is when he would give us these pep talks at the TV tapings before I was gone, he would do the thing where he'd say all these things I already knew. Yet, I was one of the guys he was letting go.

Keller: What are Watts's strongest points as a promoter and leader based mainly on your days in the Mid-South with him?

Taylor: Back in Mid-South, the first thing he did was weed out guys who didn't want to be there. Then he worked us really hard, but we felt we were part of something. I mean, that Mid-South territory, when you worked hard, it seemed like payoffs came every other day. We were drawing well and the people believed what we did. I was a babyface and I was a star. It was because (the heels) were working so hard to get me over. Those guys made me a star. The promotion helped. He had a way of motivating us so that no matter what else was wrong, we were drawing money, we were all doing the same thing together, and we were doing something important. In spite of all the shortcomings, that made the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

Keller: How about his weaknesses based on your experiences in the Mid-South territory? Such as, might his positives turn into negatives when he is promoting a down territory? You said you put up with everything else because you were drawing. Without good crowds, might Watts's ways backfire?

Taylor: Two parts to this answer. When we went to Louisiana, he was dead. He took half the crew from Memphis from Jerry Jarrett with Bill Dundee booking and that's what turned it around. From what I understand, he made 8 million bucks in three years with that crew. We turned the territory around and nobody was more important than anybody else; we were all part of it. Usually he was, not cruel, but very hard. But fair. If he was pushing us too hard, he would know about it and ease up. He got the most from his talent for the least amount of money. We knew we should have been making more money, but we were making more than if we were anywhere else.

There were a lot of things I wanted to do and I could stay off TV. That's the main thing he said was wrong, how I was used on TV. My reward for doing all the jobs I was asked to do was lose my job. It was a sobering experience. I thought I would at least have the opportunity to show what I could do.

Keller: Looking back on the latter days of the UWF, do you think that promotion had a chance to survive and thrive nationally and become one of the top two or three national promotions?

Taylor: You're damn right I did. I would have put my life on it. Yes sir.

Keller: Why?

Taylor: We went to Atlanta a week after Dusty wrestled Flair, they did \$18,000. We did \$72,000 the next weekend for a bunch of has-beens or guys who nobody wanted, a crew that people thought were less than stars, we went in there with chemistry, Eddie Gilbert booking, Watts's money behind it, and we did great everywhere we went in the country. The angles were hot, the guys were hot, we were doing great. The only thing was it was costing more than Bill thought for the transportation. It was a bigger expense than one guy could do. He didn't have Vince Senior's money to start out. He would have made it if he had a little more money.

Keller: What are some of the other things that may have stood in his way? Was being the third promotion a major detriment to success?

Taylor: I don't think so because Bill's a very good salesman. Ross was part of that. Ross is the best salesman I've ever seen. He would get television stations to get the UWF. He would work his ass off. He'd get people excited about what we were doing. Watts was getting people excited. It was just a different time. Vince at the time was doing great. The people that liked the entertainment aspect liked him. The hardcore fans interested in a more serious product liked us because we were exciting and you couldn't wait to tune in next week. I think that's what's missing today.

Keller: When did you first find out there was a buyout? What was your reaction?

Taylor: I thought things were going great. I'm the last to know everything. I didn't know anything about it. They had a meeting and said the UWF was bought out by Jim Crockett. Dusty said he was going to book it and I went, uh oh, and I knew what Dusty thought of me. We were

outdrawing the NWA all over the country at arenas and with TV ratings. When they bought us, it was a perfect opportunity to belittle us to make themselves look good. But the people saw through it.

Keller: Why did you have the feeling Dusty didn't like you?

Taylor: Every time I worked for him before, he did things to run me off.

Keller: What do you think of Vince McMahon on a personal basis?

Taylor: He's got a big ego, but he seems to be very fair with his wrestlers. He knows what he's doing as far as the wrestling business and the promotion end. He's a genius with these characters and these angles. I watch his stuff just to see what they're going to do because it is unpredictable. They've got a big machine going and week after week and month after month, they come up with big stuff. He's a smart guy. Obviously. He just does good stuff.

Keller: How much personal contact did you have with him?

Taylor: Not much. He was always so busy. Whenever he saw me, he said hello to me first. He was always very congenial and cordial. He treated us like he knew us and he cared about us. He loaned me money without knowing me. As far as a people person, he's one of the best. He's got that thing where he makes you glad you work for him. When I quit, I didn't see things as they really were. I thought getting beat on TV was the end of the world. Now I go work for Dusty and they beat me 50 times in two years, so the few jobs for McMahon weren't nearly as bad as the 50 in the last two years.

Keller: What do you regard as the biggest mistake you've made in your career that you would change if you could?

Taylor: Wade, I've made a lot of mistakes in my career and I can't think of one that was worse than the one before it. If I had to do it all over again, I don't know what I'd do. I can't go around spending my whole life saying I made a mistake and I screwed myself. We've all made mistakes. I wouldn't do anything different.

Keller: Might you have stayed in the WWF longer if you knew what you know now?

Taylor: Maybe it was time for me to leave and go to WCW. Ole was booking WCW. Ross and I were talking and he wanted to surround himself with people he thought would turn WCW around. I talked to Ross and we worked a deal out, then he got taken out of power and Ole came in before I even arrived. It didn't change anything a whole lot except the money thing. When you give your notice in one area, it's like jumping off a cliff. You can't take it back.

Keller: Do you ever regret getting into pro wrestling?

Taylor: Nope. Never. I love what I do. Maybe it's time for me to quit. They say the athlete involved is always the last to know when to hang it up. I feel great. I feel I have more to offer the business now than I ever did. If my time's up, my

time's up.

Keller: What might you have done had you not gotten into wrestling?

Taylor: I really don't know. I'm really happy and I'm just glad I did.

Keller: Do you have a most memorable moment from your entire career, when your heart was beating faster than at any other time?

Taylor: I've had a lot of those nights, Wade. Maybe that's why I like what I do so much. I've had a lot of those nights where there's nothing that feels better than having a match when people respond to everything you want. Everything clicks, the heat is there, the comeback is there, the emotion is there, it's sold out, and the people paid to see you. I don't know. It's a great feeling and that really hasn't happened to me since the days in the UWF when I was with and against Chris Adams and wrestling Butch Reed and Flair and guys like that. A broomstick can have a great match with Flair, I was just fortunate to be there. I've been lucky to wrestle in front of so many people and have them want to watch whether I was in the main event or not.

Keller: Given your personal experience wrestling Ric Flair, was he obviously in a league by himself when you were against him?

Taylor: He's the man. He is the best. He was in a league of his own. I felt fortunate to wrestle against him. When I was younger and didn't know anything about wrestling, I was beating these guys that were 35 and 36 years old that were great, like Dennis Condrey, who were tremendous and I was beating them and I couldn't understand why. I was winning as a young babyface when I didn't know how to tie my boots. I guess that's what I've been doing lately for guys who are young coming up. I guess that's just the nature of the business.

Keller: What is it about being in the ring with Ric Flair that sets him apart from other wrestlers?

Taylor: He's always totally in control. There's never a time when he's confused, mixed up, lost. He always knows what to do in any situation. And the situations he creates are always exciting. He knows how to play the crowd like a violin. He can make them laugh or cry, happy or sad. And that other guy, no matter how good or how bad, Flair can do it with or without his help. No matter if the guy is a good worker or poor worker, Flair can turn the place inside out. If the guy's on drugs, in a coma, it doesn't matter, he can still have a great match against them.

Keller: Who's in the next tier?

Taylor: Arn Anderson. Arn's really never had the chance. Bobby Eaton, too, if he wasn't so afraid to talk. Bobby can talk on the mic, he just doesn't like to do it. Bobby can do things Arn can't, but everything Arn does is so good and the timing is so good. To me, those are the two best in the business right now. Rick Rude's good. It's just different. When you get a chance to beat guys, it's easy to get heat. I'm not saying Rick couldn't get it otherwise, but he hasn't done a job since arriving and Arn and Bobby haven't won a match since they got here and they've still got heat.

MIKE TENAY

From Nov. 16, 1991 to July 25, 1992, Mike Tenay hosted the "Wrestling Insiders" program on the Sports & Entertainment Network. Because of his national exposure, he became one of the most influential journalists covering the sport. In the following "Torch Talk" conducted Aug. 17, 1992, Tenay talks about why he left the show, what his plans are, and his memories of doing the program.

Wade Keller: First of all, what is the latest status of you possibly returning to the radio scene with a new wrestling program?

Mike Tenay: I presume there is no chance I would be back with the Sports & Entertainment Network. My options now, as I see them, include the possibility of syndicating the show myself. Bill Wright, who was the former Sports & Entertainment Network station manager, the guy who lined up all the affiliates on the network—he is looking into nationally syndicating the show. That is something he is setting aside the month of August to do. I have a standing offer from another national network to take the show to that network in September. At this point, I'm seeing what kind of response there is to syndicating the show ourselves and in the back of my mind, knowing that we will have this other opportunity to be on the other network in September.

Keller: Backing up a bit, why did you quit your show on the Sports & Entertainment Network in the first place?

Tenay: The Sports & Entertainment Network made some promises to me over the course of the past couple of months concerning the future of the show and the direction of the show and the amount of support. If there was one thing I would want underlined, it would be the amount of support from the network.

Keller: Financially or having more people help or having more time or...

Tenay: Financial support is something you think about coming after you get the support from the people internally. Support from the sales staff, support from management, and I think that all falls into line, then naturally the more popular the show would get, at that point you would be making more money out of it. If the people are behind you, that's just going to happen. The people at the network were always optimistic about the show. I don't remember a time going to the station where they didn't highly praise the show. The closest thing you can use as the ratings-type barometer is this 800-number attempted-calls list, which simply from the time period your show is on, the number of people who attempt to get on the air during your program. Inevitably, every time I would go in, they would praise the fact that the Wrestling Insiders show was getting numbers like nothing else on the network, and especially like nothing else that aired on their weekend programming. I

think it's safe to say that the attempted calls for the wrestling program were as high as any other program at the station.

Keller: On any one week, what was the average number of affiliates carrying your show?

Tenay: It was always difficult to determine because so many affiliates carried live events which would sometimes preempt our program. At our peak, over any given four or five week period, if I had to give my best estimate, it would be between 45 and 55 of the 90-some affiliates on the network. I don't have anything other than a feel for the number. I know on certain Saturdays I would count the cities we would receive phone calls from, and on some Saturdays we received phone calls from nearly 20 different cities on one two-hour program.

Keller: What was the reaction by both fans and those within the wrestling business to your program?

Tenay: Both were positive. I think the majority of the people that listened, because it was a national show and it was a topic that had never been broached nationally before, 90 percent of the people listening were hearing types of information they had never had access to before. It's so easy when you're looking from a newsletter situation because you have such a captive audience. Naturally, people are going to pass a newsletter on to others who get turned on to it. But to just open something up on national airwaves when people can just arbitrarily tune in and people go, "What the heck is this I'm listening to," I think that type of approach really lent itself to positive feedback because people were hearing types of information that they had always wanted to hear, but probably for the most part had no idea what sources could give them that type of information. And up until that point, their sources had been either local-type radio shows or wrestling newsletters, so you were dealing with people who were experiencing inside-type information, really 90 percent of the audience for the first time, and they went crazy over it.

As far as the response from those within the wrestling business, it was very positive, especially from World Championship Wrestling and retired wrestlers. I never had, with the exception of Bob Backlund—and he turned me down because he was starting with the WWF just a few days after—every retired wrestler I approached about being part of the show always gave a positive response and was always interested in doing it, and inevitably said at the end of the show, "Wow, I didn't know people remember me" or something like that. World Championship Wrestling, I think saw they could use the national exposure to their benefit. Mike Webber, WCW's P.R. guy, and Jim Ross were always very helpful in obtaining and booking guests.

The WWF on the other hand, I think that just within the last probably two months of the show, I think we had made some interesting break-throughs with the WWF. While I don't know if they would have been ready to give a stream of talent to the program, simply because of

the inside type of show that it was, I noticed a lot of positives from Titan Sports in regards to the show. There were a couple of commercials that I cut for some of the affiliate stations for WWF programs. I don't think too many know about that. For example, when there was a live show at one of the affiliate cities, let's just take Salt Lake City for example, the WWF decided within the last few weeks that it would be to their advantage to run a commercial during the Wrestling Insiders show in that particular town. So I did see what I felt were over the long haul good possibilities of having a decent working relationship with Titan Sports.

Keller: How did you originally become host of the program? Had you done radio previously?

Tenay: I had done just a couple of hours of radio, really, before I got into the program. I am the Racebook supervisor of the Gold Coast Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas fulltime. I had done a couple of horse racing type radio programs just a couple of hours worth, and I was actually doing an open-sports talk radio show that ran from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. and after an hour of phone calls on horse racing, football, and baseball, the host was not getting the response he wanted, so the host asked if I minded talking about professional wrestling. We decided right before three o'clock to do it. We gave a little bit of background information on events that were coming up. All of a sudden at 3 a.m., the phone lines just lit up. I was very fortunate that the owner of the network apparently had insomnia that evening and heard the show. The radio host was fortunate to get a couple of calls an hour. All of a sudden at 3 a.m. with the phone lines lighting up as they did, the station owner who had a very negative taste in his mouth about professional wrestling, he thought the response was so great that they had a natural for the show.

Keller: Has that bad taste in his mouth changed since then?

Tenay: I don't think so, because wrestling is looked at—and this is an answer to an entirely different question—I think the hardest thing to get across was a positive response towards wrestling. So many people, including the owner of the network, because of a lack of knowledge toward pro wrestling, they have no idea what the job of wrestling radio talk show host entails. No conception at all.

Keller: How will you react in the future to perhaps another reluctant station manager who says "Pro wrestling is not a sport, thus we're not going to carry it?"

Tenay: I think while that is among the hardest sell, if you are dealing with an open-minded person, you could try to sell them on what has been a close to 100 percent positive response to the show. While it may not be something that interests you in particular, there probably is enough interest in this thing, not only nationally, but your specific area, you don't necessarily have to be a fan to recognize the popularity or uniqueness of a show.

Keller: What about it not being a sport, if it's an all-sport station?

Tenay: To be honest, if the show is presented professionally, that argument really has no basis. I think if you went on and did a show that maybe didn't react to listeners' intelligence levels properly, maybe they could have a beef at that point. If you handled it similarly to a sports-talk type program with decent guests and intelligent conversations, then the fact that it's an exhibition and not a sport, I think the crossover from hockey, baseball, and football fans to professional wrestling is so great, it's something station managers and program directors really have no clue of. They can't realize how many people there are that are closet wrestling fans or that are casual wrestling fans. So many of the casual wrestling fans got so hooked on the program, I think it would be crazy to say they became hardcore, but think of how many people were turned on to newsletters, if anything else it broadened their interest in the profession.

Keller: What kind of prep work went into your show that either was or wasn't obvious by listening to it?

Tenay: This is maybe the most difficult thing to convince—I don't know if "convince" is the right word—to try and get a point across to a station manager. They are used to programming 24 hours of sports talk where the host of the specific program he is on, that host can pick up the *USA Today*, *Sporting News*, *Sports Illustrated*, all the national publications that are available, all the wire services, the sports ticker information that is available in the radio studio, I think that the amount of preparation that the majority of sports talk hosts do is minimal. At the affiliate I work at, I've seen both. I've seen guys that spend a lot of time preparing, and I've seen guys that walk in, rip scores off the ticker and, boom, do the show, and a lot of them have the ability to do that, so it's not necessarily a bad or incorrect way to do it. But as far as the amount of time I spent for each show, I would estimate I put 10 to 15 hours a week of preparation for the show, combining phone calls, lining up guests.

Keller: Reading?

Tenay: That would add another five hours to it. The reading is something I would be doing anyway. Reading the newsletters, that would be time that I would have devoted to doing that above and beyond any radio program I do. I would read the newsletters just to stay current and up to date. As far as extra, above and beyond time I spent, people don't realize that you don't just pick up the phone and have Sting, Bruno Sammartino, and Buddy Rogers, Freddie Blassie, whoever it is. It doesn't always go that easy. It may be a case of five phone calls, it may be a case of ten phone calls before you track somebody down because of the schedule these guys are on before you make connections. Then you have to work out a Saturday night where they can devote 30 to 60 minutes of their precious time and really not get any direct monetary or any kind of reward for it. They're doing it out of the goodness of that particular person to spend the time. A person employed by WCW or the WWF, obviously they're doing it as part of their job description. But, it's another thing to have to convince people to come on the show. "What's in it for me?" I

always like to rely on the word of mouth type of response. If you're interviewing Wrestler A and he has two or three close friends, you can use him to line up two or three other people. Hey, here's a guy who is going to treat it intelligently on the air. It's not going to be treated like a circus type show. He'll ask you good questions, he knows about your background, it's not just some clown doing this program.

The biggest thing so far is getting the network to understand the amount of time and phone calls to track down late-breaking news and results, guys that are getting ready to jump from one territory to another, and then, what I always tried to do once it got down to the program, while I knew that 95 or 99 percent of the people listening to the program had not read a wrestling newsletter that week, what I always tried to do—and I would devote a strong 3 to 4 hours every Saturday afternoon just to doing the news—I always tried to have two or three lead stories that were not printed in a newsletter that week. To take the show to another level other than taking a yellow highlighter and marking up a newsletter and reading five minutes of news directly from newsletters, I tried to take the news segment of the program a step beyond that.

That to me was one of the things I prided myself in. Obviously, let's be honest, the *Pro Wrestling Torch*, the *Wrestling Observer*, and *Three Count* are used hand-in-hand to keep up to date with all the things that are breaking. They just have to be read. It is a must that those publications are read on a weekly basis so you keep up to date. I prided myself on being creative enough so that I didn't arbitrarily read items from the news. I tried to, through correspondents and phone calls, get late-breaking news stories. Even if there was anticipation of a title change the night of a show, often times we would have either a live report from the arena of a title change occurring or just word that a belt had changed hands that night. Something that would lend some immediacy to the show to make it different from just reading a newsletter. I think we succeeded for the most part.

Keller: How about your background in wrestling before doing the radio show?

Tenay: I first started watching wrestling in 1962. I was fortunate in that my grandfather had wrestled on the carnival circuit in the Midwest, mostly around the Kansas area. He was probably my first influence to explaining to me what the wrestling business was all about. This was at age 7 in 1962. I was fortunate enough to grow up in Southern California and experience to my way of thinking professional wrestling's golden years and heyday—God, I sound like I'm a hundred years old, don't I—the time period of the '60s and '70s in Los Angeles when I think of the action that was going on there was as good as anything in any other regional part of the country or world. In 1966, I started publishing a wrestling newsletter called *Mat News*. I did that for seven years, ceasing publication in 1973. In addition, I wrote stories starting from the late-'60s to the mid-'70s for national wrestling publications and the newsstand magazines. I wrote stories and columns for the Olympic Auditorium wrestling program in Los Angeles. Even after getting out of

the wrestling business, I kept as close an eye as possible through friendships that I had started and tried to maintain to keep a close eye on the business.

Keller: What were probably the biggest hurdles to overcome each week in doing the program?

Tenay: I guess it's just people that are not as involved in professional wrestling knowing what it really takes to put the program on.

Keller: How important was that to you?

Tenay: I guess the reason I stress that topic is not for ego gratification, but so people would realize that they couldn't arbitrarily take someone else and put them in that position and have a 30 year knowledge of professional wrestling, its history, its background, and its inner-workings of the business. It's so hard to explain, but it's not a knowledge that is acquired overnight and keeps expanding. I think the amount of time that is spent talking to people outside the business just furthers your education along those lines every day and you continue to learn about the happenings, the politics, why this angle didn't particularly work.

Keller: Who was your best celebrity guest?

Tenay: The most surprising was Sting, by far. I had not had a great deal of personal interaction with Sting prior to having him on the program. Every person I mentioned that I was having Sting on the show gave a very negative response as far as predicting how he would be on the show, that he would be short with his responses, that the chances were 50-50 at best that he would even call in, so to have him call ten minutes before he was supposed to, to have him agree to stay on the line past the required time, and to have him give as honest and open answers as he possibly could on a national radio setting, Sting by far was the most surprising guest.

It's tough to work it down to one as far as best guest goes. I would really have to include four or five names. I would say I enjoyed from the current crop of wrestlers Paul E. Dangerously, Cactus Jack, Jesse Ventura. From the famous wrestlers of the past, Billy Robinson, "The Destroyer" Dick Bear, and Verne Gagne I thought was excellent on the show and really enjoyed doing the show. Obviously, from a standpoint of getting the show national publicity, I have to include Barry Orton if for no other reason the amazing openness he showed on the program and how daring he was. Face it, you and I had heard for years stories about Terry Garvin and Pat Patterson and to come on a national radio show and not even flinch took a lot of courage and shocked the hell out of me that night.

Keller: Who was the worst guest, someone who had no intention of giving full attention to the show?

Tenay: I can honestly say that after doing the show almost a year, there was only one person that, to me, did not give me their 100 percent undivided attention. The circumstances were a little difficult. So I will mention the name Don Muraco, but throw in two excuses for Don. One was, we set up the interview and it happened to be on the same night as the NCAA basketball "Final

Four." Prior to being on the program, Don said, "Do you mind if I'm watching the basketball game while I do the program with the sound turned down? So he cleared it, it was the night before when I called him up. I agreed. The other problem was that Don was in Hawaii. Now, if you've ever talked on the phone to someone in Hawaii, you get a very unnerving split-second delay and Muraco often times, I would not be aware that he was still going on with an answer due to a pause or delay, and both myself and the caller would end up stepping on him. I still think that really with the exception of that interview, I could say every other guest gave undivided attention.

Keller: What is your most memorable moment from doing the show?

Tenay: There are a couple that come to mind. One is the legend-type show where we had Billy Robinson, Lou Thesz, and Nick Bockwinkel all on the line at the same time. Me, being a long-time wrestling fan, I really enjoyed the way that show went. I also remember Paul E. Dangerously in an effort to be sure he was on the show at the exact proper time, he got a speeding ticket in Kansas City which actually in the long haul caused him to be 15 minutes late because he was trying to explain to this police officer that he was scheduled to do a national wrestling radio talk show. Yeah right. He asked the police officer if there was any way he could help him in this one instance and the officer said, "Yes, I could write faster." There are so many great moments like that which pop into my mind. I can think of an inexplicable list of people that I've had on and think of an item for everyone who was on the show.

Keller: How would you rate the average level of wrestling knowledge or wrestling intelligence that people had who called your show? Did it increase the longer the show was on the air?

Tenay: The thing that amazed me the most was how easily the people adapted to getting the inside type information. While you never knew going in, just by the fact that there were always new affiliates being added, there were always new listeners on a weekly basis. You never had the same feeling you did when you edited a newsletter when you were always reaching the same audience. One of the things I always tried to do was over-explain situations because there were people tuning in for the first time where you could not use the wrestling terminology without trying to explain it, but still not be over-tedious in your explanation to those who already had knowledge. If there is one thing that I'm glad we accomplished in the time I was on, it was making people aware that there are publications like wrestling newsletters and national radio shows, that there are other people that discuss in an intelligent manner a topic that a lot of people look at as being total foolishness. I think drawing together those people every Saturday night into a situation where they all had that common interest and that common interest was learning more about the professional wrestling business was one of the fun things about doing the show.

As far as guests go, to not mention yourself,

Dave Meltzer, and Alex Marvez to me would be a tremendous oversight and a combination of not only providing on-air time helping out co-hosting the show, stepping in when I wanted to do a live remote from an arena someplace. Not only that, but also the amount of newsworthy items that were passed along from yourself and Dave and Alex. The combination of those factors I heavily, heavily relied on to make the show a success.

Keller: Did you ever get criticism because you were covering wrestling honestly rather than in the traditional way?

Tenay: I never received one critical letter. In all the time we did the show, I remember one person called to ask whether wrestling was real or fixed out of the hundreds of calls. I don't recall anybody calling in all the time or somebody saying the show was a waste of time, the stuff is fixed anyway.

Keller: What is your opinion of the state of the wrestling media—be it radio shows, newspaper columns, newsletters, magazines—compared to when you wrote an article on that for the Wrestling Observer Yearbook in 1989?

Tenay: It's never been covered like it's being covered now, not just in the two years since that article, but from going back to when I first started reading and publishing newsletters back in the '60s, there's been such a tremendous advance journalistically. It's basically come from Dave Meltzer and Wade Keller. Those two people have forced—I should add Steve Beverly, he deserves mention—the level that newsletters have achieved in the past couple of years, specifically in the last couple of months if you go back to when the scandal stories started breaking, the level of newsletters has never been as strong. The columnists and the reporting that has been done has never been as close to what has been done now. The accuracy involved now I don't think has ever been better. Some people will criticize that a lot of rumors are printed that don't come true, but I still say that as far as accuracy, the wrestling newsletters have never been better than they are now, too. The standards journalistically have been taken up so many notches, I think it's great and it's caused everybody else to work harder and look sharper in covering a lot of the stories.

Keller: What do you see as future trends in pro wrestling, given that you have seen 30—some years of changes in this sport?

Tenay: The state of this business right now as far as it is in the U.S. is surprising to me, while journalistically newsletters have opened people's eyes and radio shows have opened people's eyes to the business, I think the state of the business from the attendance and TV ratings standpoint is quite bad. I hate to say it is at an all-time low, but as far as for the modern post-cable era, promotions have never had it tougher than they're going to have it now, including the competition they are going to face in the forms of other types of TV programming. We've seen in the last couple of years from American Gladiators and Grudge Match, that type of

I think the state of the business is quite bad. I hate to say it is at an all-time low, but as far as for the modern post-cable era, promotions have never had it tougher than they're going to have it now... The promotions in the States can definitely learn a lot from watching different promotions internationally.

competition has definitely taken its toll on professional wrestling. To me, while wrestling will always have a place in the national scope of things, I think there is a lot of work that has to be done to get it back to an attainable level. Definitely the opportunity is there with the right amount of promotion and dealing with fans in the right way, and of course we see with WCW a lot of positives from the last couple of months with the way they are handling their promotion. The WWF I have been very disappointed with in the way they have been promoting in the last several years.

Internationally, wrestling in Japan has never been stronger than it is now. The promotions in the States can definitely learn a lot by watching the promotions internationally. From an independent standpoint, especially with the emergence of Smoky Mountain Wrestling—everyone had been so high on Global for a long time, to see what looked like such a strong possibility for a third national organization to take off, and I think so many people are so disappointed in what has evolved into just what is a tedious program to now even watch on ESPN—we get the feeling with Smoky Mountain Wrestling that somebody is in control who for once knows what they are doing. That, for me, is a real positive.

I would hope the WWF would realize they have a major responsibility in presenting what a lot of people consider wrestling, period. I don't think they always take that responsibility the right way. By presenting a more athletic product, I think they could benefit from it. I hope they succeed.

Keller: Back to your program, what was your reaction to them keeping the name "Wrestling Insiders" and what was your reaction to being replaced without further attempts to negotiate with you?

Tenay: Disappointment, obviously. It's tough for me to address the situation in regards to the name "Wrestling Insiders." That's out of my hands right now, it's being handled legally. I would be lying to you if I didn't say that I hoped

Every person I told that I was having Sting on the show gave a very negative response (predicting) that he would be short with his responses, that the chances were 50-50 at best that he would even call in, so to have him call ten minutes before he was supposed to, to have him agree to stay on the line past the required time, and to have him give as honest and open answers as he possibly could on a national radio setting, Sting by far was the most surprising guest.

I would be able to use the name in any future ventures I have. I sure hope that I can. Disappointment is the only thing I can say when I put as much time and effort into a project only to be arbitrarily blown away by a radio network owner without giving you any kind of a chance to discuss future possibilities for the show. My main intentions when I walked in to have the meeting with the owner of the network, obviously it was to see where they stood in regards to the program and what kind of support they were going to give to me that had been promised for months. There was never one advertisement taken out for the radio show. There were on-air promos on the network that were run, but it was really a word-of-mouth situation. They advertised all the shows on the network in various publications and TV commercials in Las Vegas. There was never any ad devoted to the "Wrestling Insiders." The show really took off by word of mouth.

The fact that I put as much time and effort into the show as I did and to walk into a situation where I wanted to discuss the future of the program and the support of the network and to be basically blown out in a five minute conversation to me has obviously been the biggest disappointment.

Keller: Are you disappointed that John Arezzi accepted the slot? In other words would you have expected from the community of wrestling media members for them to not be part of the Sports & Entertainment Network because of how you say you were treated or was that an opportunity that everyone very much had the

right to go after?

Tenay: I'm surprised that John Arezzi got the program, only because the first week's guest host, Big John Studd, had a very difficult time relating to events that had occurred in the last couple of years. Obviously he has not been following professional wrestling on any kind of regular basis, so to have John Studd come on and host the program and be basically stuck for answers on the majority of questions raised by the listeners, then to find out that the network offered the job full-time to Big John Studd after his performance, to me that only validates what I've been saying all along, that the ownership really doesn't know the difference between a program that has a lot of effort put into it and just putting anybody in there that they think can answer wrestling calls.

Keller: Are you happy, then, that John Arezzi got it or do you have mixed feelings?

Tenay: From the standpoint of being a radio listener, I would be happy with John Arezzi getting the show. I think that John has access to a lot of great guests, I think John has access to a lot of late-breaking news, and I think that John will do a very capable job. I really do. I think that from a listener standpoint, the listeners were fortunate that they have somebody hosting the show who at least follows wrestling on a regular basis. For the benefit of the network, I think that that's okay.

Keller: But are you happy John got the show?

Tenay: (pause) I think at this point I am happy with John getting the show. Basically, because I felt there sure could have been some other people they could have picked without the wrestling background.

Keller: You paused there. Are you still apprehensive that other people went after it?

Tenay: I had a couple of people call me and ask me if I minded if they went after it. There were other people that called me and said, "Hey, is there a hands off type period? Do you want me to wait two weeks or two days before going after the show?"

Keller: Obviously with John Studd having the inside track, you would not want to hold back those you perceived as being better hosts than John Studd from getting a crack at the show.

Tenay: It's really tough, when you come up with ideas for a show, to see them arbitrarily put someone in that seat without changing, really, anything. It makes it difficult for me to listen to the show since I have such an emotional attachment to the show.

Keller: Do you predict that you will be doing a wrestling radio show soon?

Tenay: I will be surprised if I'm not hosting a wrestling program in September or October. Definitely I would be surprised because the opportunities are there to do it. Now it's which avenue is the best way to go for us for the long-haul, the short-haul, whatever. So, yeah, I would be shocked if I'm not on someplace.

TORCH SIDEBAR

■ REFLECTIONS ON TORCH TALKS

Davey Boy Smith: In early-'93 when this interview was conducted, steroid use was the primary topic of professional wrestling. Vince McMahon was 18 months away from facing a prison term for use and distribution of steroids. Smith talked openly about his use and defended his reasons for using it at a time when a lot of wrestlers ran from the subject. He seemed to be trying to be as open about it without admitting to breaking any laws. He admitted he would recommend them to wrestlers he knew, but he wouldn't recommend them as a blanket policy. He said he thought Superstar Graham's medical problems were not related to use of bodybuilding drugs. Smith said he knew a lot of people who had taken steroids for years and they weren't having health problems, so he believed they were safe. I wonder how many of those people are still free of health problems?... Like many wrestlers who have done "Torch Talks" over the years, he was upset at the WWF's way of paying talent, especially with merchandise royalties... He said he would be crazy to want to work in the WWF instead of WCW because of their guaranteed contracts. Last year after his WCW stint didn't go well, he was eager to return to the WWF. His health problems, at a time believed to be life-threatening, slowed down that goal. The Hart Family lawsuit against the WWF might also derail his rejoining the WWF...

Kevin Sullivan: If all you knew of Sullivan was his on-air persona, it would probably be difficult to imagine him in a creative booking or management position. This 1994 interview, though, shows that he is a student of the game. He followed SMW and ECW close enough to give opinions on that style. He bragged about helping break Paul Heyman into the business and recognized that he'd be around for a long time as a creative force. He could defend Hulk Hogan's success while at the same time explaining the few key breaks he received and how he was the beneficiary of being the right guy in the right place at the right time. Since the interview he has worked for ECW and was part of the early growth the Philadelphia-based company received. He would move on to book WCW and still is part of the creative team there. He is a politician, too, which comes through with some of his answers. He knew not to bury anybody whom he might need to work with in the future...

Terry Taylor: It just worked out alphabetically that Taylor came right after Sullivan in this book, but those two would be the key booking duo during WCW's streak of wins over Raw. After Taylor left WCW after feeling underappreciated and verbally abused by boss Eric Bischoff, he went to the WWF and within a few months Raw was beating Nitro. His switching teams wasn't the only reason, but he was a contributing factor. WCW probably smarted from his loss more than the WWF benefited from his gain—at least right away. It was clear in this interview that he was a fan of Vince McMahon. Despite the Red Rooster character being seen as "ruining" his career, Taylor argues that to this day more people know him as that than his real name. He said he wanted to be an announcer and the WWF is now giving him that chance in addition to his booking duties.

LOU THESZ

Lou Thesz is without exception on everyone's list when debating who the greatest wrestler of all time is. Today, he is more well-known in Japan than in the United States, perhaps because of his high-profile matches against the legendary Rikidozan for the Japan-based NWA International Title in the 1950s. Today, he has taken the credibility that comes along with his name and attached it to the UWFI in Japan. He helps train wrestlers, is involved in match-making, and took part in the meeting that decided to bring the UWFI to pay-per-view in this country. The following is a "Torch Talk" interview with Mr. Thesz conducted Oct. 11, 1993 via telephone from Mr. Thesz's home in Norfolk, Va.

Wade Keller: How did you originally get involved in the strong-style "shoot wrestling" in Japan, and the UWFI specifically?

Lou Thesz: The UWFI people knew I have a reasonable amount of credibility over there as you can imagine because I beat their champ (Rikidozan). I don't think I was the only one that could have done it, but I was there at the right time. Nevertheless, they asked me if I would come over and assist them in getting away from the choreographed tumbling that they have over in this country and also in Japan. They have the same thing we have. A lot of our guys are over there doing the same garbage. I said, "Sure, I'd like to participate, but I want to come over and talk about and know what we're doing before we get into this thing." I made a trip over and talked with them and we had a meeting of the minds. I'm going straight ahead and following my nose and it's coming off very well. We're doing sellout business without television.

Keller: Is the UWFI style that the people in America saw on pay-per-view last Tuesday most similar to any other style out of the past?

Thesz: Yes. Sambo. But in sambo, they get into concession holds, but not crippling holds, which we do. Many years ago, we had three or four areas in the world—one in England, one in St. Louis, one in Chicago—and now we only have three people in the world who are well-oriented enough in this style to teach it. One is Billy Robinson from England, the other is Karl Gotch in Tampa, Fla., and me. We are the only ones oriented in learning how to hurt people.

Keller: Are there kicks in sambo wrestling?

Thesz: Somewhat, but not like martial arts wrestling. Martial arts wrestling gives you the latitude. You cannot hit with the fist, but you can use the open hand and, of course, if you use the heel of your hand, it is pretty good.

Keller: Were you part of the process of deciding to bring the UWFI to this country?

Thesz: Yes, of course. I was not too pleased with the lack of visibility before we got the pay-per-view going. I suggested to the group that

we have three to six months of satellite visibility so the people know what is happening. People don't know what they are watching unless they are educated. They know what the UWFI is in Japan now and as soon as a concession hold is secured, they jump up and go crazy. They know what is happening. But our people do not. To them it's just another TV wrestling show, which is not even related to wrestling—it's choreographed tumbling. I got disenchanted with that many years ago. This is some little light at the end of the tunnel for me that I could associate with the group that was ready to back something I wanted to do for a long time. Turner doesn't seem to be interested in this sort of thing. I know Turner and I've written him. He gave it to this guy named (Bill) Shaw who doesn't know a thing about wrestling. So I backed off.

Keller: Do you believe wrestling fans in this country are eager for something different from what they are getting?

Thesz: They must be because the house shows are dying and that tells us something. I was ashamed to be called a wrestler for several years. But now, I feel as if I can say, "Yes, I am a wrestler. This is what I'm involved in and this is what they do and I'm pleased to be there and I think it's going to revolutionize the thing and the real wrestling situation which we originally had years and years ago.

Keller: Can you pinpoint a two or three year period where there was a drastic change in style when wrestling went from what you liked to what it is today?

Thesz: A good friend of mine helped get it off the ground. A guy by the name of Gorgeous George. He was a pretty good wrestler, a junior heavyweight. But he just wanted to make a buck. You know how people are. I think the post-War era got it off the ground. We had people who were show people prior to that, but the majority of the guys were still basic wrestlers. The reason for that is they could not even get themselves booked unless they were wrestlers.

Keller: A lot of people will have seen Tuesday's event who had never seen strong-style wrestling before. Is Tuesday's event a good example of what UWFI offers?

Thesz: It was pretty good. It was about average. Some of them get even wilder and more destructive. I saw in one evening in about seven or eight matches, a couple of broken bones, a couple of knockouts, where it gets really heavy. The people need to know what's happening. As soon as the people do know what they're seeing, I think it will be a real winner. I can't see any other way it can go.

Keller: Are there two or three major keys where the UWFI will have to change its style or stress certain aspects of the style in order to be marketable in the States?

Thesz: I don't think so. They had to work a couple of years to get where they are now over there. I've worked for them now for about 20 promotions and we've had sellouts without television for all of them. We don't sell out in this country with television. It's so overexposed and the people are bored with it. It's a choreographed

I was ashamed to be called a wrestler for several years. But now, I feel as if I can say, "Yes, I am a wrestler. This (the UWFI) is what I'm involved in and I'm pleased to be there

tumbling act and it's so cooperative that if it isn't apparent to someone, they've got their head under a bushel basket.

Keller: Which UWFI wrestler is the most marketable for this country?

Thesz: Gary Albright leads the parade without question.

Keller: Was Tuesday's match with Albright against the Russians a good example of his work?

Thesz: That's Gary because he's an uptight guy and when the adrenaline flows, he gets out there and makes his move. He told me after the event when we went to have a drink and some food, "I want to get my hands on this guy and show the people the difference between what they're doing and we're doing." He's talking about Russia and the United States. He asked me to put that match together again. Gary is a gungho kid.

Keller: There has been talk of Gary not adhering to the level of professionalism or training standards that the UWFI would like.

Thesz: Oh yeah. Let me tell you something about a guy by the name of Babe Ruth. He went out and ate hot dogs and drank some whiskey and banged a couple of broads and went out there and hit a home run. And that's Gary Albright. I tell you what, these guys all respect him and they had better because his adrenaline flows. He's like a pit bull.



Lou Thesz

JESSE VENTURA

Jesse "The Body" Ventura, after a two year absence from professional wrestling, recently signed a contract to work for World Championship Wrestling. His initial contract was to work only the January Clash of the Champions and February's SuperBrawl, but it is expected Ventura and WCW will be able to come to agreement on a full-time contract. Ventura's career, though, has not just included color commentary and in the following "Torch Talk" interview with Jesse Ventura, he talks about how he broke into professional wrestling, his feelings on some of the people he has worked for and worked with, his comments on his career in the movies, his thoughts on his first year in office as mayor of Brooklyn Park, Minn., and his thoughts on the direction which pro wrestling has taken in the '80s. Part of this interview was broadcast on KFAN radio in Minneapolis on "Pro Wrestling Focus" on Jan. 19, 1992 and the rest was conducted via phone conversation about three weeks later.

Wade Keller: How did you originally get involved in pro wrestling?

Ventura: I originally got involved, of course, way back when there were roughly 26 territories. I got started with the Kansas City promotion which had Pat O'Connor and Bob Geigel and Guss Garris. I guess I'm dating myself. That was 1975. I had my first match in Wichita, Kansas against Omar Atlas.



Jesse Ventura

Keller: What was it that interested you in pro wrestling?

Ventura: Well, after getting out of the service after spending four years in the military I had hopes of playing pro football, but I figured I had to go to college first. I guess I got a little disenchanted with football. My mind probably wasn't... coming out of four years in the military, football is pretty militaristic. So, mentally, I really wasn't ready to play professional football. Then I met an ex-pro wrestler who mentioned to me, "Did you ever think of getting into pro wrestling?" Pro wrestling always appealed to me because of its individuality and creativity of it. I was able to create Jesse "The Body" Ventura.

Keller: You seem like more of an individual than wanting to be on a team?

Ventura: I was always one after four years in the service, I was tired of wearing uniforms. Football players all have to look alike, talk alike, and it's a very deep concept sport. Mentally I wanted an individual sport in my life.

Keller: You were one of the early wrestlers to break the uniform concept in wrestling. You were very outrageous with the feathers, earrings, colored hair, and flamboyance. Would you say Superstar Graham was one of your great influences?

Ventura: Absolutely. In fact, it was Superstar Billy Graham, when I came home on leave in about 1973 and went to a match at the old Minneapolis Auditorium. That is when I saw Superstar Graham in the flesh and that is when I just looked at him and said, "I can do what he does." He was a big influence on how I conducted myself in the ring.

Keller: It didn't take long before some people said you did Billy Graham better than he did.

Ventura: There were a few people who said that. Billy might beg to differ.

Keller: He might. He might not, too. I think he's a big fan of yours, also.

Ventura: I think we mutually respect and like each other. We're still good friends today. Whenever I go out to Los Angeles, I stay a lot at Universal Studios for "Grudge Match" and Billy actually lives just a stone's throw from Universal. So I always pop over and visit Billy when I'm in L.A.

Keller: Billy is having a lot of fun right now talking about the steroid controversy in wrestling?

Ventura: I don't know if it's fun. I'm sure he'd rather talk about something else, but I guess it's something he probably needs to speak out on.

Keller: Yeah, I meant that more facetiously. How did you end up entering the AWA?

Ventura: I wrestled six months in Kansas City and then they sent me out to whom I consider one of the greatest promoters that I ever, ever worked for and I have the greatest respect for the man to this day, and that is Don Owen out in Portland Oregon. I probably had a two and a half

year run out in Portland which was very successful for a young wrestler like me at the time because I had only been wrestling six months. In fact, after I had been out in Portland three months, I defeated Jimmy Snuka for the Northwest Heavyweight Championship and I had only been wrestling nine months at the time.

I then worked for Ed Francis when he opened a promotion out in Hawaii. That was terrific. You didn't make a lot of money, but there are certainly worse places you could be exiled to. Hawaii was great. I was out there with Steve Strong and John Tolos and Gorilla Lawler and we used to only have to wrestle on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday. So we had all the other days off every week. Our big road trip was to the army barracks about a half hour drive. Tolos and me and Strong used to pack lunch so we could pretend we were on a road trip. We had to eat the sandwiches quick. I was in Hawaii about seven or eight months and then I returned to Portland for another six or seven months. Then I returned to Minnesota, opened my weight lifting gym and I quit wrestling. It was at that point the AWA got in contact with me. Now, Don Owen had a fellow who ran off on him real quick, so was stuck in a predicament and he needed a piece of talent that could draw some people. I was always a pretty good draw in Oregon. So Don flew me out and first I did a promo tape at the AWA to send out to Don. It was at that point that Verne Gagne saw me do an interview and it was at that point that Verne decided maybe I was a talent he could use. So when I came back from my two weeks in Portland, I then was contacted by the AWA and started from there.

Keller: To get into the AWA considering you were trained by Eddie Sharkey was quite an achievement because I don't think the Gagnes and Sharkey have been timid about their ill-feelings for each other.

Ventura: In fact, Wade, word had gone out early in my career... Well, I worked almost five years before I got to the AWA and I always heard through the grapevine that I would never work for the AWA because I was trained by Ed Sharkey.

Keller: You were one of the first to break that barrier. The Gagnes ended up using quite a few wrestlers from the PWA near the end.

Ventura: I think I was about the first. He might have used Bob Backlund on occasion, but then he had a thing for amateur wrestlers. Backlund had the great extensive amateur background, being a small college champ two years in a row. Because of that amateur background, Verne would overlook his hostility toward Eddie Sharkey.

Keller: How was it different working for Verne Gagne as opposed to Don Owen and the other smaller promotions you worked for?

Ventura: Well, of course, it was a major step up for my career because in that day, the late-late-70s, the three major promotions you as a young wrestler wanted to achieve success in was the AWA with Verne Gagne, the Crockett's promotion based out of Charlotte which today is basically WCW, and the WWF with Vince

McMahon Sr., the eastern seaboard. Those were your three money-making territories. Those were your dreams or your goals. When I worked for the AWA, it wasn't always a smooth sail. Because I think in our own way Verne Gagne and I had our own conflicting personalities. He's a yellor and a screamer. I don't like putting up with that stuff. I don't care to be yelled at or screamed at.

Keller: You mentioned to me that you were surprised by David Shults's complimentary comments in a "Torch Talk" toward Verne Gagne because of the way he said he was treated by Verne. He was one of the first former wrestlers that I ever heard compliment Verne Gagne. Most of the stories you hear are exactly what you said, Verne's yelling and screaming. I don't think a lot of people realize the difference between Verne Gagne the on-air personality and the Verne Gagne that dealt with wrestlers.

Ventura: I used to always say Verne treated total strangers better than those who make him his money. I was concerned with David's comments. He painted McMahon as this huge tyrant from the East with this huge corporate take-over. That's true, he did all that. Let's remember one thing, people at that point, he's portraying these 26 regional promotions as being some blessing. That's what I felt David was doing, that they were all innocent lambs that big mean Vince devoured, the Christians to the lions type thing. It wasn't that way at all.

Vince McMahon could not have succeeded as he tried to do if there had not been a lot of hate and dissension with all the regional promoters throughout the country. All Vince did was, he knew that, so he was very nice to you. He gave you light at the end of the tunnel. I got to the point at the end of my career where I said to myself, "I won't wrestle again if I have to work for Verne Gagne." It was that much to me.

Keller: What was it that was so bad about Verne Gagne that it was so bad to deal with him?

Ventura: I remember one time, the late Adrian Adonis and I, the East-West Connection, we had three consecutive sell-outs in Denver, Colorado. I'll never forget this. That night something in the match Verne got unhappy with. My viewpoint would have been if I was a promoter, I would have walked up to my top talent, which Adrian and I were then and said, "Hey, guys, three sellouts in a row. Great job guys, keep it up" and pat ya' on the back. Verne screamed at us in the shower over a trivial little thing that meant nothing in the match. You sat there and said isn't that gratitude. The guy gets three consecutive sellouts and all the money you're making for him and he didn't appreciate it at all. He rarely had a kind word for you.

Plus, he was also very brutal in the power game. I know of two incidents, a good friend of mine, Big John Studd, and another friend of mine, John Tolos, who were fired for no reason at all. John Studd had a very lucrative deal in Japan at the time where he would go to Japan three times a year and make really big money. Well, he had a six-week tour coming up and

Verne sat him aside and said, "John, you can't go. You're so much involved here in my promotion. Won't you stay?" He basically pleaded with John Studd to stay, so John cancelled his Japan tour and stayed. Well, one week after the Japan tour started, Verne Gagne fired him. That happened quite often then. He wasn't an easy guy to deal with. For a guy who portrays himself as mom and apple pie and the University of Minnesota on TV, if you worked for him, it was a horse of a different color. And I think you'll back me up on that, Wade, with all the wrestlers you've talked to that have dealt with him.

So getting back to the David Shults thing, Vince could not have done what he did had there not been some really bad promoters out there. Nick Gulas, Dick the Bruiser, and all of those people, I mean they used to cheat the wrestlers out of money and things of that nature all the time and make conditions just horrible. So Vince saw that and knew the time was right.

Keller: Was Verne Gagne at least generous with payoffs, since he wasn't with compliments?

Gagne: Verne Gagne wasn't a bad payoff man. I distinctly remember, also, when it was the nitty gritty time after Hulk Hogan and Gene Okerlund had left and there were rumblings, this and that, throughout wrestling. Me and Saito were teamed up at the time and we had a match in LaCrosse, Wisc. and it drew pretty well and we got a pretty good payoff on it. We had a cage match the next month and the house jumped \$5,000 at the gate, yet when I got my payoff, I took a \$100 pay cut.

Keller: Today there are guarantees and pay is based on a lot of things other than house show receipts, but in those days that was the way things worked.

Ventura: In those days, your incentive was, the more people you put in the seats, the more money you made. Generally thinking, if the house went up, payoffs went up accordingly. Saito and I were the main event and the house went up \$5,000, from a \$15,000 house to a \$20,000 house, yet I took a \$100 pay cut. I remember going to Wally Karbo because Verne and Greg went off on their ski trip and so they weren't available and I told Wally, "This doesn't make any sense. Our incentive is to put people in the stands to make more money. If I put more people in the stands and make less money, I'd rather wrestle in front of no people and probably make more money. That was basically one of the last straws for me and with the Gagne promotion. Because this was a time where I felt they should have been taking care of the talent they had here to keep them from jumping to Japan. They were cutting your money and forcing you to go to Japan.

Keller: Under what circumstances did you leave the AWA?

Ventura: The way the story went, the long story was, I left Mr. Gagne in the Spring over my position on cards and I didn't feel he was treating me the way he should be, so I just left. The following fall, my daughter was born and she had

I sent Verne a telegram and it was dated telling him I would no longer be working for the AWA. My contract was up and I had no obligations with him. Well, Verne went ahead and continued to promote me basically. He didn't tell the people that I wasn't there, that I was with the WWF.

a lot complications at birth and she had to spend about a month in intensive care. It kind of created a cash flow problem. I realized I would have to swallow my pride and not worry about how I felt personally because my daughter's safety was most important to me, so I said I had to get back into the ring.

So I remember I went in to see Mr. Gagne. He, of course, had the advantage because I was coming to him asking for a favor because of the particular situation I was in. He basically read me the riot act and told me I was useless and he couldn't use me, and almost threw me out of the office. So I called Vince McMahon then—I had worked for his father—and I told Vince what had happened with my daughter. I said, "I've never asked nobody for nothing in this business, but I need a little help." He pulled his book out immediately and said, "I'll book you in Boston, at the Garden, and Hartford this weekend. The people still remember you." This was before the WWF went national. He said, "We'll book you on weekends only so you can spend Monday through Friday with your daughter." So for all of the people who think Vince is a horrible tyrant and Verne is mom and apple pie, I beg to differ. So what happened then was a couple days later, I think David Shults had jumped and Verne called and said, "Be at TV on Saturday." So I called Vince back and said, "Now he's going to book me." Vince said, "The important thing is to be close to your daughter, so go ahead and go back with Verne."

To make the longer story short, about six months later is when Vince made the big move nationally. It was at that time he called me and told me he wanted me to jump to the WWF. It was a little bit after that payoff we talked about earlier, so I was ripe to move and I was excited about it, to get in on the ground floor. If this thing fails, you're probably going to be run out of wrestling. But if it succeeds, you're probably going to get more fame, fortune, and what have you than you'd ever get in your career. So I took the gamble and left. So I sent Verne a telegram and it was dated telling him I would no longer be working for the AWA. My contract was up and I had no obligations with him. Well, Verne went ahead and continued to promote me basically. He didn't tell the people that I wasn't there, that I was with the WWF. He ran a card in Illinois and

basically told the commissioners he didn't know where I was, so the Illinois Athletic Commissioners were going to ban me for life for failing to show up. So I was with the WWF, so they had a big hearing and the WWF sent a representative with my telegraph to Mr. Gagne stating that I would no longer be working for his promotion. It was dated three to four weeks prior to when my so-called appearance in Illinois was supposed to be. Gagne knew I wouldn't be there but he told the athletic commission he had no idea why I wasn't there. So, in a way, he deceived the fans and deceived the commission. Well, the commission saw the telegram and basically said, "You're off the hook."

Keller: When you went to the WWF, obviously a lot of changes were taking place, Vince was going national. You ended up coming back to the Twin Cities right away. You weren't gone for long and were wrestling on local WWF cards here. What was it like working for Vince McMahon in those days when Vince had a lot fewer skeletons in the closet and was really ambitious with a lot of ideas and excitement? How was it different from the AWA?

Ventura: Vince was like a savior. He spoke nice to you, he treated you with respect—at least he did to me. Maybe David Shults has a different opinion. Vince was a guy you could communicate with and he was a guy who had big dreams. And I think I had big dreams. So we meshed together really well at that time.

To give you another quick example of what Vince did for me in light of the Gagne-McMahon controversy. I got injured with pulmonary embolism, blood clots of the lungs, about a year and a half later when I was supposed to headline against Hogan all around the country and it knocked me out of wrestling. But the good thing is, that's when I got into broadcasting. So many times you get something good out of adversity. Well, when I went down in a San Diego hospital, you know, wrestling at that time was—you wrestle, you get paid. If you went down, you didn't get paid. I was lying in my hospital wondering what I was going to do because this obviously was going to put me out of wrestling at least 90 days if not longer. And Vince called me on the phone and said, "Jesse, don't worry about a thing, I'll pay you as long as you're out." I'd bet anything that you would have never got anything like that out of Verne Gagne. I mean, when I pleaded with him for a job when my daughter was in intensive care, he slammed the door on my face.

Keller: How did you get into color commentary?

Ventura: During the time I was recovering, I didn't know if my wrestling career was over—and it wasn't. I came back in the ring—but I needed to find a new job because many professional athletes don't realize that at some point the career ends. When you're at the height of your career, that's the last thing that enters your mind. And then boom, all of a sudden it's taken away from you, so you have to go job hunting. It's pretty hard to put on your resume that you've been a pro wrestler for the last seven years.

That's not going to get you too many jobs with IBM or General Mills or what have you. A friend of mine said what a good talker I was and that I ought to get into broadcasting. So I went over to Channel 11, KARE 11, and did a piece on Cyndi Lauper. It was at that time Vince saw the piece I did and he called me up. I was actually going to work for Channel 11. Vince called me up then and said, "Jesse, I've got an idea. Do you think you can do color commentary?" And I said, "Sure." So he brought me in and I was basically the first "villain" to get on the microphone and take a side of wrestling they weren't used to. I was a guy who sided with the bad guys and said it basically took as much talent to pull hair and hide it from the referee as it did to do a legitimate hold. And it caught on. It was one of those freak things. It caught on like wildfire and I think I even got too big for Vince.

Keller: You started out with Gorilla Monsoon on what was then called "All-Star" and later turned into "Challenge." Then you moved to the A-show, "Superstars", with McMahon and—what did you call him?—"Replay" Bruno.

Ventura: I liked having Bruno there. I needed a straight man, and if there is one straight-man in the world, it was Bruno Sammartino.

Keller: I don't think Bruno was able to throw too many verbal jabs back at you?

Ventura: (laughs) No, not too often. But I do like Bruno, he was a terrific man. I hated to lose Bruno. He was a good sounding board for me.

Keller: He ended up leaving under worse circumstances than just about anybody. He probably is more bitter now than just about anybody.

Ventura: Probably, and I don't understand why because Bruno had one of the best careers you could hope for in professional wrestling.

Keller: I think Bruno has a lot to be bitter about concerning the way wrestling has turned out versus the way he would like to see it turn out?

Ventura: But that's not Bruno's choice.

Keller: Exactly. That's why a lot of friends lend him the advice to kind of relax and just accept things the way they are.

Ventura: Yeah, things happen. Look, in football, they go domed stadiums. I'm sure if I talked to the old "Purple People Eaters," they probably get sick to their stomachs watching Viking football in the dome. But that's the way the sport evolves. That's the way life evolves. Bruno maybe got trapped in a time warp and personally couldn't adjust to the times.

Caller: In the last two weeks we've had Superstar Billy Graham and Dave Shults characterize Vince McMahon as the prime force behind steroids in pro wrestling. Both of the men characterized Hulk Hogan as a child abuser.

Ventura: First of all, it's an opinion whether Hulk Hogan is a child abuser. As far as Vince McMahon being the catalyst behind steroids, maybe Vince changed wrestling a little, going to

these huge muscle bodies which in turn can involve steroids. I can only speak for myself and my own experiences. Vince McMahon never told me to use steroids.

Keller: If you had not used steroids, would you still have had a job as a wrestler?

Ventura: I think so. I think at that point and time I would have. Maybe today, I've been out of the ring since 1986. I can't answer for 1989. I tried and used steroids at one time, but I haven't used them since 1981 and I subsequently worked for Vince McMahon. As far as Hulk Hogan being a child abuser, I don't think Hulk is knowingly out there to abuse any child. I know Hulk Hogan and he's a pretty caring guy, but he did make a mistake in not coming clean. I came out years ago and did a poster for the Food and Drug Administration stating that I had tried steroids and they're not good for you and don't use them. I think the mistake Hulk made was he was given the opportunity to do good. He was given the opportunity to send a message to children to not use them, that they are a drug, and that they're a dangerous drug. Instead, he took the route of denial. I think that's the worst thing he did in this instance is denying that he had used them.

Keller: Do you think it's going to catch up with him?

Ventura: I don't know. That's up to the public. The public forgives and forgets. Oli North's a hero now. Give me a break, you know (laughs). How the public reacts to someone, you don't have a barometer on it. But to call Hogan a child abuser is a bit strong.

Keller: The justification on Graham's part there is just saying that because Hulk Hogan portrays himself and the way he looks as the healthiest way to look and the only way to achieve that look is to take steroids, which are not only dangerous, but illegal.

Ventura: They are now. One thing that has to be made very clear now, Wade, is that up until 1988, steroids were not illegal. You could basically go to any doctor and if he wanted to prescribe them to you, he could. It was only when in 1988, I think it was Senator Biden of Delaware that got a bill passed federally that made steroid use a felony or a controlled substance, the same as cocaine and other recreational drugs.

Keller: There's no question that's an important point to bring up because a lot of the steroid use wasn't illegal until recently.

Ventura: When I got them back in the early... I think another thing, didn't David Shults say that Verne Gagne would have never tolerated steroids? What a bunch of baloney that is. You can't tell me Verne Gagne didn't know he had people using steroids.

Keller: And quite a bit of other things probably.

Ventura: Who knows. I don't buy that one either. Remember one thing, the only thing promoters are concerned with is making money.

Keller: What led to your departure from the WWF? I believe it had to do with a computer

game?

Ventura: Well, it had to do with marketing. I don't want to get into a lot of it right now because I do have litigation pending with the WWF right now. So, as attorneys tell you, you don't want to talk a lot. But it was over a marketing thing. I was approached by Sega-Genesis about a possible deal of making a Jesse "The Body" wrestling video game. Well, I own the rights to my name and I own the licensing to my name, Jesse "The Body" Ventura. Basically Vince McMahon told me I could not do that. I said, "Why, I own the rights? It's not going to cost you anything. I'll make some money. We'll all be happy. And he basically gave me an ultimatum and said if I did it, my job was in jeopardy. And you don't do that to me, Wade. That's the worst thing you can do to me, challenge me and give me an ultimatum. I immediately made the Sega deal happen and it was July of '90 and August 1 cut loose.

Keller: Since then we haven't seen much of Jesse until "Grudge Match" debuted in syndication. Talk a little bit about that show.

Ventura: Well, Grudge match is just a great concept from a producer named Rich Malcolm who, in fact, used to work for Turner Broadcasting and Turner Entertainment a few years ago. Rich had the concept and hired me to do it. Basically what we do is take average Joe Q. Citizen who has a grudge and we put them in the ring and let them do it in a very controlled, fun attitude where nobody really gets hurt too bad, yet they breathe hard and throw pies in each other's face. We had one guy as a matter of fact who after boxing came into his corner and threw up. Where do you get good TV like that where you can actually slow-mo it coming out of his mouth and then put it back in again? That's television at its best.

Keller: Only on CNN when they're covering George Bush in Japan.

Ventura: (laughs) Right. In fact, Grudge Match might be a good place to separate all of these presidential candidates. We'll stick 'em on Grudge Match and we'll eliminate them all and get it down to who'll run against who. But, that's how Grudge Match got started and it's doing just terrific. I'm excited about it and looking forward—we've got one full season in and I'm waiting to hear if it's picked up for another year, but I don't see why it won't be because the numbers are excellent and it's starting to develop a great following. I enjoy working with Steve Albert and Michael Buffer and John Tenna and all those people out at Universal. It's a good time and a fun show.

Keller: It's a well-produced show, also. The production values, the announcing, and the pacing of the show are top-notch.

Ventura: Oh, yes. I think that's part of the success of it. We treat the contestants like it's Mike Tyson against Evander Holyfield even though it's certainly not. We hired Bob Dunfi who does all the major fights in Vegas and is our camera director and all that. We treat it like it's a legitimate heavyweight fight, only they're throwing pies in each other's face.

SEAN WALTMAN

Lightning Kid made a sudden impact nationally in the GWF on ESPN last year. A year after his national TV debut, Lightning Kid talks about his GWF experience, his Japan tours, his future aspirations, his thoughts on WCW, his temptation to get on steroids to possibly increase his chances of getting hired by a major promotion, and why he doesn't believe his physique is a drawback on his chances to get over with crowds. The following "Torch Talk" with Kid was conducted July 6, 1992.

Keller: One moment you were under a guaranteed contract with the GWF and you were the Light Heavyweight Champion, the next you're no longer wrestling for them. What happened?

Kid: They brought me in in December for their big show with three title matches. They were all two-out-of-three falls matches. It was a good show and I almost couldn't make it. Their budget didn't allow them to get me a real airline ticket, so I had a ticket I hadn't used because of the big storm at Halloween. I was going to use that, but the airline wouldn't let me use it, so Joe had to pay for a regular airline ticket after all. I almost didn't make it, but I made it and was supposed to drop the belt to Jerry Lynn since he was driving in every week. They decided they couldn't afford me anymore. That's not what they told me, but I know that's what they were thinking. They promised they were going to bring me back, but they never did.

Keller: But weren't you under a guaranteed contract?

Kid: As far as I'm concerned, I'm still under a guaranteed contract.

Keller: But they're not paying you?

Kid: I would have to go to Georgia to sue them. It's not the GWF as we know it now, it's the Galaxy Group, Carol Lindsay and Dan Overstreet. Max Andrews may have been a part of it. But Carol and Dan were the president and vice president.

Keller: Do you think Joe Pedicino handled the situation as best he could concerning you not being brought back?

Kid: I don't know. I saw them here in Minneapolis when they had the LPWA pay-per-view. He was nice to me. I can't say anything bad about Joe. He did bring me down there, got me the exposure, and treated me well. I was told I was going to be brought back. I never was. Eddie Gilbert even called me right around the first of the year and said, "I just wanted to call you to let you know we haven't forgotten about you and we're going to get the belt back on you."

Keller: From what you saw first-hand in the locker room and in Dallas, what do you think of Joe Pedicino as a promoter? What did he do

well versus not so well?

Kid: He was very creative. His good points are that he wasn't afraid to go out on a limb, say with me for instance. He did try to give the people good talent because he is a fan himself. He's not going to promote the steroid monsters. He came up with all the original characters like Handsome Stranger which some people didn't like, The Patriot who got over really well down there, he did a lot of good things down there. Some of the bad points were Rasta the Coo Doo Mon, which maybe wasn't a bad point as far as some people were concerned since the WWF seemed to like that gimmick... Bill Eadie could have had something to do with it. One thing is I think (Pedicino) went over his head. You can't promote that much TV, I don't care who you are. WCW and the WWF never produced that much TV. Especially with the budget they had, they can't produce that much. They apparently blew \$750,000 between June and October. That's incredible.

Keller: Was Joe over his head in just TV burden, or as a promoter, also? Did he have the promoter skills to get wrestlers in and out and keep the wrestlers happy?

Kid: Like running the dressing room? Fantastic. Very good. But it wasn't just him. It was Bill Eadie and Scandar Akbar doing a lot of that. They were very good. Scandar Akbar is really easy to work with. He's a great guy, actually. It was well-organized, if not more organized than the WCW taping he was at.

Keller: Before we get to WCW, you've been to Japan a few times. How do you like wrestling in Japan in front of those fans?

Kid: I've been there five times now. August



Lightning Kid

It seems like WCW probably feels they couldn't use me or I wouldn't be a good addition to their company. I actually offered to fly out there on my own frequent flier miles so they could see me again. They've got this new top rope rule or whatever, so I don't know if they felt I wasn't valuable anymore, because of that rule.

will be my sixth time and it's great. It's a lot different.

Keller: How's it different?

Kid: You can't get away with being lazy. I consider my lazy style is like getting away with comedy things and things like that. You can't do that over there. It's more athletic, more an athletic contest as far as the people are concerned.

Keller: How about the way the promoters operate the dressing room, say compared to the U.S. scene?

Kid: Well, they don't do TV so it's a lot different. It's just house shows, so as far as that goes it can't be that hard, just go out when you're supposed to and that's it.

Keller: Do a lot of the people out there speak English or do you communicate through more primitive means?

Kid: The wrestlers don't speak English. They speak very limited English. They know a few things. There's kind of a universal wrestling language, it seems like. Everyone knows how to communicate wrestling-wise.

Keller: Do moves have the same names?

Kid: A lot of them do. Some of the moves that people around here make up names for have technical names. Some moves that I did I didn't know had a technical name. Like Frankensteiner or the flying-spin, headscissors, there's real names for them. The promoter knew good English. Wally Yamaguchi, the referee, knew perfect English. With that it was pretty easy, it made it a lot less stressful.

Keller: Did the fans in Japan react any differently to your style compared to the U.S. fans other than just demanding perhaps more wrestling? In the U.S., it usually takes at least 90 to 120 seconds before the fans buy into you as a legitimate wrestler (due to your size). Was that the case over there?

Kid: they reacted to me differently because I didn't work the style that the Mexican guys work there. I just work kind of a hard style, People were yelling out, "You're in the wrong promotion!"

Keller: You work for Universal Pro Wrestling over there. Is that all Mexican style wrestling?

Kid: Mexican and some Japanese guys. Mainly the lucha style. There are some guys like The Cowboys who were the Silver King over here. They worked a good hardcore style and not a lot of the things that make lucha libre look choreographed. I just worked my own style. A lot of stiff kicks and suplexes and things like that.

Keller: Given your style, what group would you fit in best?

Kid: Probably New Japan. Actually, All Japan or New Japan.

Keller: Do you have aspirations or do you think it's possible to eventually work for one of the two major groups in Japan?

Kid: I don't know. Before I went to Universal, the day I left I believe somebody tried calling me because I was supposedly booked for New Japan. I was a day late and dollar short.

Keller: Does working for one promotion cut back your chances of working for another one?

Kid: It's cut back, but it's not totally impossible. It used to be totally impossible, but it's not really like that anymore.

Keller: Would you be interested in working a semi-full-time schedule for SMW or the USWA?

Kid: Yeah. I know I wouldn't get rich, but if I could make a living, that would be great.

Keller: How many dates are you working on average per month?

Kid: I'd say around 8 to 10.

Keller: On how many of those dates does it make it worthwhile to actually go to the show and wrestle on it?

Kid: Around half, to be honest. Maybe five per month out of eight or ten. But it's either go or sit at home, so what do you do?

Keller: Being somewhat of a "name" independent wrestler, you probably get more offers than the average independent wrestler other than a Paul Orndorff or others with WCW or WWF exposure. How do you view the independent scene? Is it struggling or strong?

Kid: It's good and bad. Some guys are making good money at it. Hercules is still doing independents even though he's working for WCW. Honky Tonk Man is making some decent money, probably. Independent promoters, though, can't afford to make any independent wrestler rich.

Keller: You had a tryout with WCW the day before Bill Watts was hired. How do you believe you did and how did others react to it?

Kid: I felt I did well. The fans really reacted well. The guys in the dressing room really said I

did well. Magnum T.A. told me I did well. Dusty Rhodes even came out and told me I did well.

Keller: Did you believe they were sincere or was this the ritual they went through with everyone who got a tryout?

Kid: I got the feeling that it was pretty genuine. Why else would they go out of their way and leave the little room they're in to tell me that? I felt and it seemed everybody else felt I did great. People who did reports on the show said I did well. Actually, a report that I read said I did better than I actually thought I did.

Keller: What have you heard from WCW since that tryout?

Kid: I called several times and it was always them telling me they didn't know anything yet. There was a good reason since Bill Watts just came in. But I just talked to them right around the first of July and they just said they would call me if anything came up.

Keller: What do you think the prospect of them hiring you in the next few months is?

Kid: Slim and none. And Slim just left town. That's just my opinion. It seems like WCW probably feels they couldn't use me or I wouldn't be a good addition to their company. I actually offered to fly out there on my own frequent flier miles so they could see me again. They've got this new top rope rule or whatever, so I don't know if they felt I wasn't valuable anymore because of that rule, but I was prepared to show them I could do just as good of stuff without using the top rope, whereas some people are just special because they can do stuff off the top rope.

Keller: Taking away top ropes, what do you think are your strong points? Obviously the top rope moves are a strong point with you since you can do stuff that would kill most people?

Kid: Wrestling. I mean, I hate to be corny, but that's the name of it, "wrestling." I've got good psychology, I think. I don't just go out there and do moves that don't make sense. I do moves when they make sense.

Keller: When someone looks at you, you are one of the slimmer wrestlers who has made it to mainstream wrestling in a while, do you believe they see you as being frail?

Kid: That's possible. It's absolutely incorrect, though. That's totally false. I'd like to think I'm as tough as anybody out there as far as taking abuse and all that. I've been on shows with bigger guys who bitch about being suplexed. There was this one guy on one show who took a little suplex and bitched about being too big for that and being hurt. I've jumped off the top rope to the outside the ring and I missed the guy and hit the ground and got back up again.

Keller: Do other wrestlers in this area that you wrestle against regularly consider you one of the tougher wrestlers in the area?

Kid: I don't know what they think. I'd like to think so. I know that they all respect me. If I had to guess, I'd say they at least consider me equal with them.

I get a good reaction no matter where I go. I don't think my physique is a drawback. It almost helps because I'm different, I'm so out of the norm that people might be really interested in seeing me. You have all these guys out there who look the same, they all have the same builds, and you need different looking guys. All I need is a chance to prove myself.

Keller: All humility aside, but being truthful, why should WCW hire you?

Kid: From what I've seen, I'm just as good or right up there with any of the light-heavyweights they have right now. The reason they got this light-heavyweight division going was I thought to show off the Liger-style and my style and that of Chris Benoit. I do probably more high-risk moves than any other wrestler in the United States next to Cactus Jack. I'm not going to take a hip toss off the stage onto the floor like he did. That's one thing I don't think I'd want to try.

I think I have charisma. For some unknown reason, people like to watch me. I get a good reaction no matter where I go. I don't think my physique is a drawback. It almost helps because I'm different, I'm so out of the norm that people might be really interested in seeing me. You have all these guys out there who look the same, they all have the same builds, and you need different looking guys. All I need is a chance to prove myself.

Keller: How about the fan reaction?

Kid: I think I've proven myself. I was a heel in Texas. Magnum T.A. said, "Well, I really can't picture you as a heel for WCW." I was a babyface during my tryout and the people reacted very well.

Keller: Is it wrong to assume you can't be a heel because you are young and slim? Is it an oversight on the promoters' part to not realize fans have seen everything typical and that you might break the monotonous mold out there? Do people like Magnum think too traditionally and they're not willing to take smart chances and that might be why they aren't drawing fans to arenas?

Kid: Well, it's not that they're thinking too traditionally. I don't think that's the reason. I think some people just have some blinders on. I think people should take a more open look at things like Joe Pedicino and Bill Eadie did in Global. They gave me the chance and I proved I could get myself over.

Keller: Do you feel you got yourself over as a heel or just over as a gimmick?

Kid: I believe I got over as a heel. If you go back and look over the tapes and if you were there in the crowd, they had to have more security guaranteed—double the amount—on me than the others because it was real heat. Heels nowadays get cheered half the time. I got the people to hate me because I was beating up all of their favorite wrestlers. I don't understand what I didn't do to prove myself in my tryout.

Keller: Do you think if you gained 20 pounds by taking steroids that WCW would take a more serious look at hiring you?

Kid: It's possible.

Keller: It appears there have been and are many wrestlers in WCW who don't have the track record, talent, experience, dedication, despite Japan tours or national exposure that you have. Does it seem the only missing ingredient is steroids?

Kid: That's one way of looking at it. I'm not going to go out and say that's why they didn't me because I'm not on steroids or whatever. But I was told, "The only thing that is hindering you is your size." That was Magnum. But he added, "I'm not telling you to go out and use steroids." But I didn't think I was any smaller than Ricky Morton when I was there. I stood next to him. And look at how much he's done in his career. I'm 6-1 and pushing 200 pounds right now. I'd venture to say Morton is 5-9 and 190. That's what he said, I was smaller than most of their smaller guys.

Keller: Have you debated in your mind taking steroids since this experience with WCW?

Kid: When you get such a letdown like that, a lot of things go through your mind and that was one of them. Maybe I should go out and take a ton of steroids and get really huge and maybe I'll get the job. But you've got to get off them sometime and when you do, you're going to shrink again. So that's out of the question. I'm not going to do them. I'm 19 years old and I'm going to work out and go on with life.

Keller: For how long will you accept not making a good living by wrestling before you quit the business and look at other options?

Kid: I never look at it like that. This is what I do. If I have to go to Mexico or Japan to make a living, that's what I'll do. But that's pretty sad. I could see if I didn't do a good job or whatever, but they spent over \$1,000 to fly me down and look at me down there. But I thought I did well.

Keller: What do you think of the top rope rule?

Kid: In my opinion, the light heavyweight division has to be different. To justify it to the fans, I can kind of see where he might want to do that. What I would do is just ban the top rope for heavyweights and allow it in the light heavyweight matches. If it's a legit heavyweight wrestler vs. light-heavyweight, then heavyweight rules apply. That would put an emphasis on why you would want to watch the light heavyweights.

BILL WATTS

Since Jim Crockett Promotions purchased Bill Watts's Universal Wrestling Federation in 1987, fans have been yearning for "Cowboy" Bill Watts to return to the promoting scene. Bill Watts's Mid-South promotion, which became the UWF, is looked upon by many as the most consistently solid wrestling programming of the last ten years. His promoting style is extremely popular with hardcore wrestling fans. Each time WCW has searched for a new booker, Bill Watts's name is shouted by hardcore wrestling fans. Each time, hardcore fans have been disappointed. Instead, fans have had to deal with the failures of Ole Anderson, George Scott, several booking committees, Dusty Rhodes, and always Jim Herd.

In this exclusive "Torch Talk" interview with the previously silent Bill Watts, Mr. Watts discusses the state of professional wrestling, the result of the Jim Crockett buyout, his previous negotiations with World Championship Wrestling, and his candid and harsh comments concerning the current WCW office staff. The three hour interview was conducted by telephone on July 24 and 26, 1991.

Wade Keller: Let's start with the Crockett buyout. Why didn't the addition of the UWF help him?

Bill Watts: Crockett bought me and then went broke for numerous reasons. For six months I tried to tell Jimmy what he was doing wrong, but Jimmy wouldn't talk to me and neither would Dusty. Dusty's ego was so big and Jimmy was never a booker and could never book. Dusty was the one who had the Carolinas going. Dusty's always been a genius, but Dusty's never had respect for the bottom line. Even when Dusty booked Florida, he broke the stock holders. See, Dusty used to tell me, "I outgrossed your year in Florida." I said, "Dusty, this is Bill you're talking to. Who are you bullsh---ing? You're talking grossing. I ran on bottom line." We had it so good in Florida that they were literally scalping tickets at Miami Beach every week. And we had a race to see who would sell-out the earliest in towns, Dusty Rhodes or Eddie Graham. So, I mean, that's the kind of thing we had going. But I didn't care. Dusty could beat all my records. Records never meant anything to me. Bottom line meant to me, what I ended up with in my pocket. He broke the stock holders down there. So anyway, his ego got so big that he wouldn't talk to me anymore. I could have sat down with them. I was on a consulting fee that they were paying 33 grand a month for. I tried to tell them both it didn't cost them anything. "You don't have to do anything but consult with me. I'm tellin' ya", I see what you're doing. I'm not blinded by the trees. I'm not in the forest anymore."

I could always look at another area and tell what was wrong. Just like one time when my area was down, I called Jerry Jarrett. Jerry Jarrett is a genius. He doesn't have a lot of consistency of follow-up, but if you can have Jerry Jarrett stop

action... I brought Jerry Jarrett and Jerry Lawler to my area and they told me what was wrong with it. "And boy," I said, "you're right."

I spent some time in Memphis. He wanted to fire Jim Cornette. And he had a couple of guys, Dennis Condrey and Bobby Eaton. We put them together with Cornette to form The Midnight Express. And then he was getting rid of Ricky and Robert and we took the Midnight Express and sparked our business with it. Then later on he told everyone we stole his talent. I didn't steal anybody from it. Hell, I went over there and he gave them to me with his blessing. He wanted to keep Jimmy Hart and get rid of Jimmy Cornette. Well, Jimmy Hart was great, but Jimmy Cornette was young and fresh and awesome. And then Bobby Eaton was an unbelievable athlete.

Keller: When Turner bought Jim Crockett Promotion, were you considered to be part of Turner's staff?

Watts: When Jimmy Crockett went broke, Turner wanted to pick it up, so they gave me a settlement in order to pick it up clean. And at that time I didn't want to go back into it, not at that time. I didn't want to go back into it. Not at that level. I got my kicks because I believe Turner lost well over \$4 million their first year. Then they flew me out and wanted me to meet with their corporate head. But you see, the problem is now, the genius that built Turner Broadcasting, and he is a genius, is so insulated, you can't get to him anymore. He doesn't read anything negative. A guy told me that knows him really well, "He thinks he's so great, he's sitting around waiting for somebody to nominate him to run the Earth." The funny thing is, all the letters I'd write him

would end up in all his subordinate's hands. And Herd would have copies of it, and Jack Petrik would have copies of it.

Keller: When did you first interview with Herd for a position with WCW?

Watts: I flew down to the SuperDome (Clash, March 1989) to meet with Herd, but by the time I got there, Barnette and everybody had put so much pressure on him about me, he was even afraid to meet me. So we had dinner, and it was ridiculous. They had spent a fortune to promote the SuperDome and they didn't draw sh—. They had flown in a band, they had skydivers, they had all the ex-champions—and ex-champions are great, but they don't draw you five cents if they're not in the ring—all this window dressing and it was a total flop. I think they lost 30 or 40 grand on the event. And Herd asked me that night at dinner, "What do you think is wrong?" And I said, "I think you're a mark. You want to be in the dressing rooms and smell jock straps instead of running the enterprise. You want to deal with all the wrestlers and you don't know a thing about it. You need somebody to deal with the wrestlers and you do what your expertise is." Herd said, "Well, I heard that you'll want to take my job." I said, "I wouldn't try to take your job. Sh—, I worked for Eddie Graham and didn't try to take his job. You've got to realize that every person that's knocking me, that should be a compliment. Because the ones that are knocking me are all broke or out of the business. You've also got to realize that every territory I ran made money. I was the main eventer in every place I ever wrestled. I wasn't just a flash in the pan. But the thing is that the stock holders made money. Whoever owned it made money off of me, too, because I did good for the promotion, yet at the same time I had a sense of the bottom line.

Keller: So obviously nothing came out of that first meeting with Herd. Did you meet with him again?

Watts: They brought me back for an interview with Petrik. I told Petrik, "Hell, I wouldn't work for Herd. Hell, he don't know what he's doing. He's an idiot." Petrik asked, "Why not?" I said, "First of all, if he had any smarts, any balls, I wouldn't be here having this interview with you. Because he should have hired me when he had the chance. Herd was to be involved in the original deal. But I told Herd, 'No, I don't want your job. You do your job. But I'll do mine and you're not to interfere with it.' And he had a list of people he wanted me to fire."

So I told Petrik, "Here's a guy who presented a list of people who he wants me to fire, people he's hired, and he's sittin' in your office knocking everybody to you. You think I'd ever be wanting to work for him when I'm out on the road bustin' my ass and he's in here knocking me. If he hired all these people and they're so bad, why doesn't he fire them?" I said, "A lot of these people he wants to fire, they're not bad at all, he just doesn't know how to manage them."

So anyway, Petrik wanted to offer me \$300,000 to straighten it out? It won't take me but three months to straight it out." But I said, "Let's do it this way. I don't need a salary. Let's do it totally on incentive, on how much I cut your losses, how

much your ratings go up. I want a piece of the action on the television revenue, on pay-per-views. Anything that is an increase. We will start with your average for this past year and set it and I want increases on everything. If you do movies, tapes, pay-per-views, whatever."

Keller: Why wouldn't they accept that offer of you taking the risk of working for nothing?

Watts: There's Petrik sitting there and he's got to make Herd right because he's the one who hired him. The second thing is, I'd be making more money than he is. It's that corporate jealousy. I said, "You know Petrik, your problem is it's become a corporate deal where you have to cover your own ass and you don't give a sh— because it's not your money they're blowing." I understand they lost a million dollars last June. And their gates are a joke.

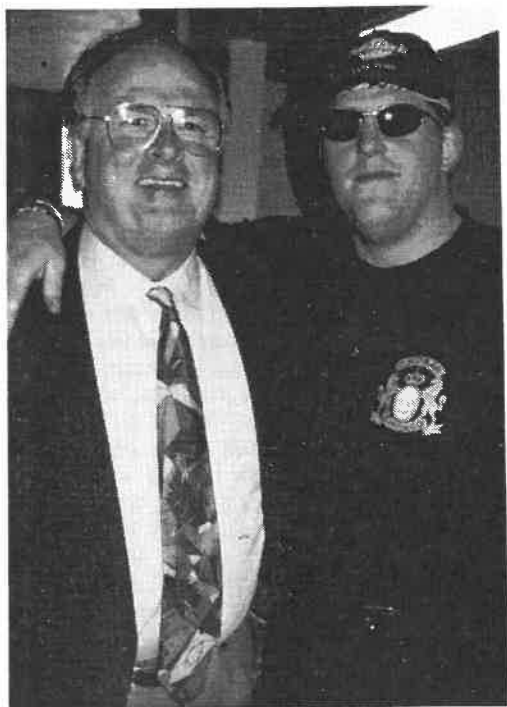
Keller: What do you think about WCW bringing Dusty back as booker?

Watts: He's the one that bankrupted them. It's the same thing. He broke Crockett. And they brought Ole back, too, and he's got a good mind, but they didn't give him the power to do anything. But Ole is the one that lost Georgia. And they tried with a booking committee and everybody was pushing their own agenda and there was nobody there to set the direction. It's just been a ridiculous merry-go-round of hiring a guy and firing him. They've been through Dusty twice.

Keller: And George Scott is probably next.

Watts: Yeah, George will have to be next. And George, let me tell ya', never did anything. He got his reputation in the Carolinas, but that was all set up by John Ringle who just unfortunately couldn't control his own weaknesses and lost everything. But you've got to realize that Johnny Valentine and Wahoo McDaniel came in there and they changed the whole direction of the territory. The Carolinas had always been a tag team territory with stars that had been there forever. And here they brought in new faces. Johnny Valentine was a great performer, but it took them a year to get him over. But by the time he was over, he was over. Wahoo was at the peak of his career. And Ric Flair was just getting great. But George, his imagination was zero and he had no color, yet he thought he was so great. A good finish for George was a one-hour Broadway.

So here they are in the greatest economy and they're doing fabulous. George thought he was doing great, but the truth is he tried to book Georgia for Jim Barnette and he didn't last any time at all. He tried to book Oklahoma for Leroy McGurk and he couldn't draw flies. And he's tried to do it for them and George just can't do it. Then he's a nice guy in a way, but he thinks he's a booker and he really isn't. He had one good run and that was set up by a guy named Johnny Valentine. Valentine was guiding George. It's like Buddy Rogers used to do. He would bring in his own crew and tell the promoter what to do. That's why Buddy made so much money and gained so much power. He was ahead of his time. That was the same syndrome there. And George ran on his momentum. Ole Anderson was a tremendous manipulative mind. He had guys, too, who could feed him ideas.



Bill Watts

Let me tell ya', I always believed in the guys giving me ideas. I didn't ever think that I reinvented the wheel. I've always been a manager, but the difference is I probably am one of the only guys left who had to do it all. In other words, from the television to the promotion to the bottom line. You have a guy like Dusty who's been a booker. Dusty's never been a bottom line guy because he's never been involved in that. So Dusty talked Crockett into two airplanes. I had a Phillip's Aviation Performance Center and I told Jimmy I could set up a special deal with Phillips where you can buy fuel so much cheaper around the country and he wouldn't answer that letter. So then he went and bought a jet for Dusty that wouldn't carry any people. You know, the airplane concept isn't a bad one if you buy the right equipment. But I mean, it broke them.

There's Dusty with his ego out there. I'll never forget we promoted the SuperDome and one of the deals with Crockett was that we needed a 24 hour a day limousine for Ric Flair and a 24 hour a day limousine for Dusty Rhodes. I said, "Jimmy, that's bullsh-- and I'm not paying it. I don't mind them going from the airport to the arena with the 'You're the big superstar thing' in the limo, but I'll be damned if I'll ever pay a limo driver all night." Jimmy said, "Well, Dusty and Ric like to get out at night and eat and..." And I said, "Jimmy, you've become a fan. You believe that sh--. If Dusty and Flair want to go party all night, they can go f---in' party, but not on my f---in' limo that I'm paying for, so I wouldn't pay for the limo. I still respect Dusty and I still respect Ric Flair for what they were.

Keller: Speaking of Dusty, what do you think of him today?

Watts: I think Dusty has no personal discipline. Dusty is a genius. Dusty has to have somebody who has an iron hand above him who knows wrestling. Then Dusty can be successful. If Dusty has somebody sitting above him that Dusty can buffalo or Dusty can fool, like Jimmy Crockett—the problem with Jimmy Crockett was he couldn't book. So he couldn't say, "Dusty, f--- you. If you do this, you're out and I'll run it." Well, see, every time I've had Dusty working with me, believe you me, I knew Dusty was a genius, but I could do it, too, so he couldn't bullsh-- me and I wasn't afraid of firing him. And, see, that's the difference. That's the problem with Turner Broadcasting. You've got a corporate structure. Turner broadcasting has turned into a bunch of feudal systems where every head of his division wants to cover his own ass, and here's Jack Petrik, who doesn't know sh-- about wrestling and he's hired a guy who's a complete idiot. Herd is a kind of guy who is a complete back door artist. He is a corporate animal. He knows very well how to sit there and butter his own bread with his corporate buddy. But let me tell you, it's like I told Jack Petrik, the buck stops at the top. If you're in charge of the division, how can you sit there taking credit for it when it's the sh--s. Of course, you see, with Turner Broadcasting, they need their original programming so that's all wrestling's become to them. Their problem is they're losing their ass on the road. And that's a shame. And so what you have is wrestlers with no pride. Vince McMahon must die laughing every day because

he rarely went the wrong direction and they've become a cheap imitation of McMahon where they should have had their own identify. At least Crockett and Dusty started off differently originally and were doing pretty well. And then they got caught up in the same syndrome.

You're not going to out-copy McMahon, you're gonna look like a copy. He's got his own original style and stamp and he's very successful with it because he does his promotion right. He's got Hulk Hogan who's a fabulous guy. And for whatever Vince is promoting, he catches the public's attention. The only way to go is the opposite way he goes. The only problem is, under Ted Turner they've become a cheap imitation copy which has finished them off. You go to their gates and there's no house, the athletes all sit in the dressing room and have no pride anymore. They're just collecting their checks.

Keller: What do you think about the guaranteed contracts WCW signed?

Watts: Well, let me tell you, if you create a situation where guys can collect their checks when the house is the sh--s, you have taken the desire and the incentive out of them. In the old days, if the house was down, you busted your ass to get it up and you knew that the gate depended on your pay. Yet, today, you've got guys who make a fortune whether it draws five cents. It's like the Ric Flair situation. They could have Hulk Hogan and wouldn't know what to do with him. The wrestlers are just tools to use and if the promotion doesn't know how to use the tool, then the tool is no good. Hell, you could have a diamond drill there with Turner Broadcasting and they'd treat it like a pick. They don't understand. And unfortunately because Ted Turner doesn't pay attention anymore—Jack Petrik told me himself. He said, "Turner doesn't mind losing money to get a division started." I said, "Yes, Jack, but there is no sense in losing this kind of money in wrestling. It's a cash flow business. It's not like putting equity into buying something to get it started. This is a business that should be making money already. And let me tell you, there is no reason the division should not be making money on all fronts. And it's not that hard. It really isn't. It's just the way they're managing it and the people they keep going back to. The one thing about me, they really don't appreciate somebody who's honest. When you tell people the truth in the corporate world, it scares them.

And you've got to realize that everybody that was there when I went over for the interview, they were already doing the job on me because anybody that knows they weren't doing their job knew they wouldn't be there long because I don't tolerate dead weight. I mean, if you're working for me, you better be pulling your own weight or you're gone. All these guys that knew they were on a gravy train, they're going crazy because they were afraid I was going to get the job. Everybody was calling me going, "You going to keep me?" I said, "Hey, I don't even have the job." And I said, "Let me tell you, everybody starts with me even. There are some people that would go the day I get there because they are just not worth having around. But you start even because you know what I expect and I don't have to like you to work with you. All I expect is performance. so I said,

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"If you perform, you keep your job, and if you don't, you're history. It's simple."

They have probably one of the greatest commentators in the business, another kid that I trained, Jim Ross. And he's a hell of a guy. Of course, he's got to watch his step because he's a Bill Watts fan. But Jim is overloaded. I mean, he's trying to do too much. He can only do so much.

Keller: What do you think are the chances of you returning to WCW and the promoting scene?

Watts: First of all, like I said, I wrote Turner to tell him what I thought of the Petrik interview, and I wrote Petrik as well to tell him what I thought of my Herd interview. So sh--, I'm sure Ted Turner—when you get to his level, he doesn't need somebody who says, "Hey, Ted, you're wrong on this." See, I even struck a deal in my last letter just to rib him because that time he and I talked, I told him the coach of his NBA basketball team was a complete raving egomaniac, in my opinion because he had the little man's complex and he wanted to be the feature instead of his basketball stars. I said he'd never win the championship for him and it pissed Ted off and then I reminded him in my last letter, "Ya' just had to fire him, didn't ya." Ted doesn't appreciate that stuff. He's got so much money that the stuff that goes on there (in WCW) doesn't mean that much, although it should because it could turn into one of the most successful divisions.

The only way I'd work for Turner Broadcasting would be to work directly with him and him be my boss because the other people can't handle it. Jack Petrik can never hire me because anybody with a brain on his board would go, "Well, you interviewed this guy a year and a half or so ago. Why didn't you hire him then?" So Jack Petrik can't hire me because he's already hired two guys in the interim, two guys that I told him couldn't do it and that's on record. And he can't do it and he won't do it because I've told him the truth, too. They can't live with the truth. You see, when they

Dusty's always been a genius, but Dusty's never had respect for the bottom line. Even when Dusty booked Florida, he broke the stock holders. Records never meant anything to me. Bottom line meant to me what I ended up with in my pocket. So anyway, his ego got so big that he wouldn't talk to me anymore.

get to that comfort zone, then the truth doesn't mean a thing. They're going to make their money whether the division goes up, down, or sideways. Petrik's on the board, you know. Turner's quit looking at how bad he's operating that division, a division that should be making money. With Turner's power and the power of that station, the thing you would need is for Turner to cut through the red tape. You got so many things they could pull together to promote wrestling. You've got the Atlanta Braves that could promote wrestling, you've got CNN that could promote wrestling, you've got Larry King that could promote wrestling. You've got all these things that you could pull together for a synergism to promote wrestling and make it the most heavily impacted thing in the whole country and instead they sit there and pull each other apart. I know the answers to it all because I had it all figured out when I was going to go back out there to turn it around. Now I don't even pay any attention to it and I don't consider it ever happening.

And the other guy would be Vince. Vince is so tremendously smart and ahead of the times that I think Vince and I would probably get along great, but he doesn't need me. He's doing well on his own. But what could I do for Vince when he's got his thing going, and going well? And I am not going to work for Jim Herd. He's an idiot. And if I were to go out there, it's not going to be a corporate structure where you're discussing what I'm going to do with this piece of talent or in this match and everybody at the station knows it. Everybody at the station puts input into what they think they ought to do for angles. It's ridiculous. That'll never happen, either. Effectively, I've burned my bridge with them because I've told them the truth. But I feel like you better know what I think. I'm just not the kind of guy to sugarcoat things. I'm not a great politician. That's why I'd never be in politics. I tell you what I think. I don't give a f--- whether you like it or not. I figure that I'd rather know what a guy really thinks than have him just "yes" me because he wants to hang onto his job. If he's a "yes man," he

has no value to me. Then I can't get a true opinion, so I think the people like Ted Turner would really appreciate that if they knew me, but I think Ted's gotten beyond that since he's been so successful. I don't think there's many people... I think you'd have to be a complete diplomat, let him sit there and smoke his cigar and wave his sword and walk around the room and tell him how great he is. Sh--, he's already proven that. I mean, hell, I know what an entrepreneur he is. So I thought my only value to him would be an honest opinion. But that pisses him off. If your opinion doesn't coincide with theirs, you've pissed them off.

Keller: A lot of people are talking now that WCW may get so bad that Ted may drop it...

Watts: Well, I'm surprised he hasn't dropped it yet. You've got to realize he needs fresh programming on that SuperStation. He's got to have something because of those rules. He still gets fairly decent ratings, although nothing like he should.

Keller: What if it got so bad that people were really surprised he was not dropping it and he really should drop it, but he did not want to drop it. Then would you become an option?

Watts: I don't think they even consider me. I don't know if I want to anymore. Hmmm. Well, yeah, I would do it for one reason. I tell ya' the biggest reason. You've got to figure what your biggest motive is to do something. Money has never been my overriding concern. People think it has, but it hasn't. I've always done what I've liked to do and done it as well as I can do it and the money takes care of itself. Now, I would demand money because that's what they should have to do for me doing it. But I wouldn't do it just for the money. I would return to wrestling to show everybody I could do it, and do it successfully.

I'd do it to show Ted Turner, "Ted, I told you I could be a key part of your operation. It would be for the pride of doing it just to show him. Then I think he might let me do other things that I might have ideas in. And that would be exciting because he is at the center of a lot of things happening. I think that would be a fun thing to be a part of. It's not a mystery to me. I don't even watch it anymore. I can tune in and see it and it hasn't changed that much. It's management and it's understanding the tools that you're working with and the vocabulary and the things that create it. And it's understanding fans. All the fans want to get is what they paid to see. My motto was always, "Give the fans more than they paid to go see." I always believed, if you look at my old wrestling shows, they gave the fans more than they anticipated. That's why they liked 'em.

I liked when these first insider newsletters like the *Torch* came out. I used to get a kick out of when people thought they knew my direction when they didn't. But that's why they loved my show. But when they could predict things, well... And let me tell you, I don't read the newsletters much anymore. I pick up yours every once in a while and read it just to see what's going on. I haven't read an *Observer* in a long time. But they used to pick trends out in my own business. And I would tell the promoters, "You outta read these kids. They're a f---in' mirror." And they wouldn't

do it. They'd say, "F--- those kids. What do they know?" I said, "I'll tell ya', those kids are like that small crowd that's left when the weather's bad. They're the people who love this sport, they love this sport no matter how we've bastardized and raped it. And if they're pointing out something that's so f---in' apparent it's stupid, don't you think everybody else sees it, too." And I'd read all of your newsletters and I would love it when you all knew my direction, but you didn't. I also loved it,—not loved it, it would offend me when you would point out how stupid I was doing something. But I would have to look at it then. I would have to look at it and evaluate it. I wouldn't quickly say, "They're right." But if I saw something when they're right, I'd admit, "Hey, I did that wrong." Because ya' see you can also go through trends in your own mind when you get intoxicated with yourself. And you can lose and forget what got ya' here. But the thing that built wrestling was that it was something that was brought to the fans in each town that they could participate in. And when you lose that and you start insulting them all, some of them will go anyway because they love the sport, but then they start going for a different reason. They're goin' because it's so bad and they get their kicks out of how badly the promotion can f--- it up. Again, to put back the range in it. We were one of the first promotions to study our market and build around different demographics. Then you couldn't have everybody be steroid freaks. You've got to have a complete range. Hell, that's all the fans want.

Keller: Okay, let's say it's around January and Herd and Dusty are fired and Jack Petrik resigns and another corporate guy hired you. You have your entire hand to do what you want. What are you going to do?

Watts: Unless I met with Ted Turner and Ted gave me his blessing and I believed him, I wouldn't f---in' touch it. Otherwise I wouldn't touch it. It would just be another corporate animal. That's what they breed over there.

Keller: Let's say Ted gives you his blessing...

Watts: If Ted sat down with me and we had a fabulous rapport... Ted and I had a fabulous rapport one time. Let me tell ya', I think the guy was a genius. And he says, "I want you to do this," so I knew exactly what he wanted. Ya' see, I couldn't fulfill my goal if I didn't know what his goal was. What they're really doing now is cross purposes. They cannot be successful in the way they are going without some major changes in it. And I don't want to get into it now because every time I've tried to give them the answer they've tried to copy it. Fortunately they've just been copies and they haven't been successful at it, because none of them have the single-mindedness of their purpose to see it through until it's successful. They can't read it anymore. So they start it and jump off of it if they don't get instant gratification. And you can't build that way. It's like when Ted Turner built his empire, he knew where he was going. That's like me in wrestling. Once I was with Eddie Graham for that year and a half, two years, from then on I was focused and knew where I was going. I would make slight detours at times, but my direction was upwards and forwards. I saw it.

I've talked to people over there at different times and they've tried to copy what I was saying, but it was just a copy. Since it wasn't their vision, they couldn't see it and couldn't carry it out. If it didn't get instant gratification, they said it must not be working. So I doubt that there would ever be a corporate structure I could fit into. And there are a lot of people over there that still fear for their jobs. They don't realize I don't have axes to grind. All I would care about is getting the job done and do what I had to do. So, I would still have to sit down with Ted for a couple of hours—and Ted doesn't like to sit that long with anybody, he loses interest. But I would want to know what he truly believes his goal is and I would like to structure it so it couldn't change next week. Because otherwise I couldn't please anyone there. I would need to know what the boss wanted. Ted understands enough of wrestling. I don't want to deal with a corporate head that doesn't know wrestling. So I don't think there's a chance of that.

Keller: Who would you have under you if you were hired by WCW?

Watts: Oh, let's not get into that in case it ever happened. That raises too many problems. They would only be there as long as they could produce, but that's incentive to produce. If you've got a team they've got to be sharp. They can't be in a comfort zone because, unfortunately in wrestling, it comes unbooked every night at eight o'clock. You can build momentum and run on momentum, but it's going to take one hellacious amount of energy to turn that giant around because they've let it go so far in the dumps. It's like a guy asked me the other day, "Wouldn't it be hilarious if Vince was still paying Dusty?" I mean, I haven't talked to Dusty since the Crockett fiasco. It's just that Dusty's arrogance has gotten so carried away. And I've known him since he got in the business. He and I have been up and down the highway. We used to be so close. It's a funny thing with so many people and their mentor. At some point they want to put their mentor down, but I don't know why because let me tell ya', when I was down, I would call Dusty and ask for his ideas. I've never been bashful. I didn't give a sh-- whose idea it was. The key to me was the bottom line.

I was one of the first promoters that pulled myself out of the ring so I could build other stars. I was the one that was telling Dusty for years to pull himself out of the ring, that he was getting too fat and he was no longer the "American Dream." He was "The Great White Whale." Get out of the ring. Use your genius. His ego couldn't let him out of the ring. He was consumed with his own ego. And I went through that. The first star I ever built by myself in Oklahoma was Dick Slater. I'll never forget coming out of the dressing room in Shreveport and all the fans running past me to get to Dick. And it pissed me off. And I had to go sit in the motel that evening and look in the mirror and get my ego under control. "You just made a star, now you don't have to be in the towns each night. Now build another one, and another one, and another one." You didn't want all your eggs in one basket, even though Dicky's word was good, he could be a in a car wreck. That's when I first started understanding getting my own ego under

control to a certain extent. Let's face it, we're all ego driven. But that's when I started building stars and my gates took off. And that's what we did in Florida. We had so many ways to go, that the way fans were flocking to the arena because they couldn't sit there and pick our direction.

Keller: Okay, let's get into the steroid issue. How have you approached that issue as a promoter?

Watts: There is only one book that I could find that exposed steroids. Oh, I guess in the '70s or '80s, called "Death in the Locker Room." It was written by a guy who was an amateur wrestler and he really researched it. And he talked about the Eastern Block Nations and how they were feeding the steroids to their athletes, studying them, and calling them up after their competitive years were over and studying them. Those athletes were scared to have children. They didn't know what they'd have because of the steroids. The Eastern Block Nations were even giving the women gymnasts blocking steroids to keep them from developing and prevent them from having their period and not developing into full women because their bodyweight changed. They wanted them to have the strength of their age but not the weight. Some of these people who escaped were terribly afraid to have children.. So I really got into that and made each of my children write a theme on that when they got to that peer pressure stage which is already in high school about steroids.

So I've seen the mind alteration. I've seen the product of steroids. I kept telling the guys they didn't need steroids. Hell, in 1968 I was as strong as anyone and was wrestling every night and I never touched steroids. Bruno Sammartino was benching over 500 in 1962. And he never took a steroid.

Keller: Where does the responsibility lie, concerning the steroid issue? Is it the promoters' responsibility to test or does the wrestler have the right to take steroids as long as the promoter does not reward the results?

Watts: We know that wrestling's an exhibition. At this stage, let's face it. It's not like the National Football League. Therefore, I have to agree with something I heard Barry Switzer say one time when he finally resigned at the University of Oklahoma because he had some athletes that raped a woman and had some other athletes that got caught selling cocaine. He said, "I didn't think I had to put up on the dressing room door 'thou shall not steal, thou shall not rape, thou shall not sell cocaine.' You would figure that when a kid comes out of the home and comes to college he should know that." Well, I don't think it's the promoter's fault. I think certainly from my—and again, all the litigation out there today, in my humble opinion myself, I think Vince McMahon used steroids himself. You can look at him and see. Anybody that's got a brain in their head can look at Hulk Hogan and at least believe he is a steroid product. I mean, he shows all the classic symptoms. I think that's encouraged steroid use.

I never did. I was always against steroids. I'm not patting myself on the back. I just didn't think they were necessary because I didn't have to have everybody be the biggest and the strongest. I

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wanted all various sized guys because I wanted to attract a wide range of demographics. But I don't blame Vince because otherwise, if a wrestler goes and kills somebody, he should say, "Well, I did that because the promoter wanted me to." Give me a f---in' break. Are you going to go stand out in front of a car because the promoter wanted you to? I don't think the promoter's responsible. Now, if you're the NFL, they as a league have to develop their own policy. If their policy is anti-steroids, then it should be anti-steroids. If their policy is pro-steroids, then it should be pro-steroids. I think the problem in America has become that we are taking more and more freedoms away from people. It's like a motorcycle helmet law or a seatbelt law. The only person you kill in a motorcycle wreck is yourself. The only person you kill in a car accident if you're not wearing your seatbelt is yourself. So I don't think that is something that should be legislated. I think to legislate that or make it illegal is an infringement on our rights and our privacy. I think America is becoming a police state. I don't think that these things are anybody's business. So if you want to inject yourself with a steroid and take the chance of killing yourself, then I think it's your own business.

Keller: Would you as a promoter—or do you think it would be right for a promoter to—reward people who took steroids inherently in the way you promote?

Watts: As a promoter, you're profit-driven. Let me tell ya', I had talent that drew money without steroids. Ted DiBiase drew money for me without steroids. Paul Orndorff drew money without steroids—well, he may have taken some later. I'm sure Paul took some, but he wasn't that big then. Jim Duggan didn't take steroids. Steve "Dr. Death" Williams didn't take steroids..Terry Gordy didn't take steroids. Jack Brisco didn't take steroids. Dory Funk Jr. didn't take steroids. And you drew money with the athletes and with your promotional ability. I don't require steroids. If you want everybody off 'roids, what am I going to

Everybody has input into what they think they ought to do for angles. It's ridiculous. Effectively, I've burned my bridge with them because I've told them the truth. But I feel like you better know what I think. I'm not a great politician.

say? "I'm not going to use you if you're on steroids?" Again, I think that's up to the guy.

Keller: That's what I'm wondering. If you're promoting in a way that inherently says if you take steroids, you're going to get bigger, and I push big guys, like Vince does, and even like Herd is doing, you're inherently saying the guys who take steroids are going to get the big bucks. So ethically, if you are going to promote in a way that pushes musclemen, wouldn't you also want to test as comprehensively as possible?

Watts: Yeah, you truly can always justify that and I understand what you're saying. Yeah. Again, though, it's an exhibition. If it was the National Football League where there's a competitive edge, then I think they have to make a league decision and really stick with it. Of course, their testing's a joke, too. But, we have alternatives now, by the way. There are now nutrients that can do the same thing as steroids.

I've got a product right now that will give people the same benefit of steroids where they can take the more intense workout with a faster recovery time and it's all nutrients. It's approved by the NCAA and approved by the Olympic committee. It's just nutrients. So what they need to understand with steroids, it does change their minds. I remember a wrestler telling me once, "Every morning I get up, I want to kill somebody." Because they were shooting up something that was a scary deal. And what we would do is throw bananas at them and all that stuff. Let me tell you something, for all their steroids and all their other sh--, one night they were running their mouth and I told one of them, Why don't you go out there and grab Doctor Death and slap the sh-- out of him, and they say, "What, are you kidding me?" Doc didn't take any 'roids. Danny Hodge didn't take any 'roids.

Keller: Well, how do you solve the problem then? You look at someone like Jim Herd who comes out and is the laughing stock for saying that you don't need to test for steroids because it's like alcohol, it's each individual's choice. Whereas Vince McMahon has given in and announced he is going to test for steroids as a P.R. move even though steroids are difficult to test for and HGH is impossible to test for. What's the solution?

Watts: Vince is the proof that if you lie to somebody with a straight face, they'll buy it. And Herd is just a f---in' idiot, anyway. Let me tell ya', Herd's problem with TBS is that he is a dumb f--- making dumb statements and he's also a dumb businessman. See, here's Vince who has inherently promoted steroids and has taken them himself and how he manipulated Hulk Hogan out of that trial, I don't know. I don't even know the real basis of the trial when Hulk has said, "I used steroids three times." What a crock of sh--. But anyway, Vince is making a boldface lie and he's applauded for it whereas Herd basically said the truth and is in heat for it. Basically, again, I don't know. I'm not sitting there. I was always against steroids. I didn't make a conscious use of a person because of steroids and I didn't make a conscious use of somebody because he didn't use steroids. I always told the guys about steroids and I told them about cocaine.

But if I would then say you can't wrestle for me because you use steroids... I wouldn't set a f---in' policy. I would set a policy about drugs and alcohol that you better show up at the wrestling and not under their influence and be able to work. Now what you do in your personal life, you're not my employee. Therefore if I go into your life and say you can't work for me, it's just as bad as the other way. But you see, I didn't use a guy just because he's big. He could be a big f--- and couldn't work and then I couldn't use him. So the steroids didn't get him there.

Keller: So let me get this straight. You would be sure you as a promoter would not push someone where if two people stood next to each other and one guy had a better build than the other, all things being equal...

Watts: But that doesn't have to do with drawing money. It only has to do with drawing money when you're the only guy in town. Now there's where Vince is. But when you're not the only game in town... You've got to realize I used The Rock & Roll Express. I used the Midnight Express. Hell, which of them ever used steroids? They were little shits. I used Jimmy Garvin. Hell, I used Danny Hodge and he was a junior heavyweight. Hell's bells, we drew money with Bobby Shane. So I didn't think... You could take a great big guy who was super impressive and he couldn't work. You see, we required more of our athletes than they require today. I used Randy Savage before he got so big.

Keller: In reference to when Sting and Ultimate Warrior were in the UWF, the story goes that you told them to learn to wrestle or get out, and that's why Ultimate Warrior left.

Watts: I don't really remember why Dingo (Warrior) left except that he was a dumb sh--. I know one of them got the sh-- beat out of him in Baton Rouge by Dicky Slater and got his head shoved down the toilet. Sting was the one at the time I thought showed the right attitude and the right development. But there was never anything by me on Ultimate Warrior because of steroids. Sh--, I would guess that guy injected everything in his life, but mainly he couldn't work then. I remember when Stan Hansen and Bruiser Brody were teaming together. Stan Hansen was blossoming and Bruiser Body was holding him

back. And Hansen became a big star before Brody and then Brody learned how to work. That's not to say Ultimate Warrior didn't learn to work. But at the time he was here for me, I don't remember having any heat with him. He just didn't show up one night. And he was a gutless wonder. And I think that he couldn't work. I worked some matches with him. He was learning slowly and hell he was doing all right. He was paranoid. The problem was, at that time, all he could do was pose and he couldn't work. Well, just posing wouldn't do it for me. You had to have action. I didn't consider just posing as action.

Hell, how did Waldo Von Erich ever get over every place he went? Hell, he never took a steroid. It was because of that mouth of his on TV. He could talk. But he wasn't a great worker. He was a great talker. He was one of the all-time great ones and the people hated him. So you had to take what the guy had, his best feature, and go with that. So I didn't give a sh--. It was their business what they took as long as it wasn't hurting me and the wrestling. When they came stoned or came drunk, then that's when I got on their asses. With steroids, it didn't make a difference one way or the other. But I talked to each of them. We used to come together every time we had TV and I would talk to them about steroids and what it was going to do to you. Just like I talked to them about the business and the way it was going to go. Now they call back and go, "You tried to tell us." I go, "Well, I was always straight with you." Everybody that left knows that whether they liked me or didn't like me, I always told them the truth. And that's all you can ask of anybody. So I didn't think it was my job to legislate what a guy does on his own time. I think that's a violation. Otherwise, pretty soon I'm going to get in trouble for not making sure they got their minimum daily requirements of vitamins and three square meals a day. Hell, next you're going to make everybody wear a rubber constantly so a guy can't go out and get VD.

I mean, give me a break. Where does it end. Pretty soon are we our brother's keeper 24 hours a day? What the hell is our brother's responsibility? So what I'm saying is sometime when you're 21 years of age, you're supposed to be a man. You gotta' make some decisions for yourself, so if you want to get to hell, you've got the right to get there any way you want. I mean, some of us accelerate at it. I mean, all you can do is talk to them about it. They're going to do what they want, anyway. I don't blame Vince for steroids. I think some of his positioning is ridiculous, but he gets his kicks out of doing it that way. But I certainly don't blame him for steroids. Because if you can work, you're going to get over for Vince. There're some guys still drawing for him that aren't complete steroid freaks.

Keller: But then there are other guys who have been asked to gain 20 pounds or else they...

Watts: Let me tell you this. If that 20 f---in' pounds made or broke them working for him, then that 20 pounds wouldn't have made or broke it anyway because they didn't have what it took to get there. Let me tell you, that 20 pounds was just him trying to get them to do something else to help them. But I mean, the 20 pounds wasn't the criteria, I can guarantee ya' that.

BILL WATTS

Five days ago a special mid-week edition of Pro Wrestling Torch was published, eight pages of which were dedicated to analysis of the hiring of Bill Watts. There have been many opinions expressed on what Bill Watts is likely to do in WCW. As a follow-up to the special Torch mid-week issue, this is the first segment of an interview conducted Thursday morning, May 14, 1992 with Bill Watts by phone from his new WCW office.

Wade Keller: How does it feel to be back in the wrestling environment?

Bill Watts: I'm very excited. I guess I've always liked the wrestling challenge. I haven't watched much wrestling or anything else lately, but I've got a great love for wrestling and the tradition that's wrapped around it. I haven't liked the direction it's gone. I think the standard bearer is without a doubt a brilliant man, but also as far as I'm concerned he's created a macabre cartoon, so it was with dismay I saw it being copied here. As far as I'm concerned with Turner Enterprises and WTBS here, they should be setting the standard for the industry. They should have their own clear-cut identity. I think they have all the people. They've got great talent, a tremendous staff that loves the business and everything else. The thing was the people who were making the final decisions didn't understand or know wrestling, so their perceptions then were, well, they'd try something, and if it didn't work, they'd try something else, and all the time they were downtrending.

Keller: You say they were going in the wrong direction, but explain what direction you want to go more specifically than just opposite of the WWF?

Watts: First thing is I want to rebuild the confidence of the wrestling fans in our events. I want who's booked to be there on the card. I want to rebuild our television ratings. I want to get back to presenting the product that's on the marquee, "wrestling." I want the contests to be between the opponents. I don't want the referee to be a factor in the decision. I want to stress the athletics of it, the toughness of it. A lot of products are "in the can" that are airing now through the 27th of June, so it will be a while before I can get a lot of our concepts introduced. We'll start working with the basics and the direction changes. We have the athletes. They all love the business and they all want it to be a successful business. I think before they were all kind of nervously saying, "Thank God I'm making all this money, but I don't see a bright future for this industry."

Keller: Have you had a chance to see many WCW shows over the past few weeks?

Watts: No, I haven't even had a chance. I've seen only three television shows. There's an

awful lot; I could go down the list and tell you all of the things that I picked out. I don't think that would be constructive to do because that's history and we'll just take it and go forward. Dusty (Rhodes) is excited and pumped up. Jim Ross is pumped up, he's a knowledgeable guy. Tony Schiavone is pumped up. Rob Garner is pumped up. Everybody's just getting as excited as hell. They're starting to see that when you have a vehicle that's misdirected, everyone starts grasping at straws without realizing that the very things they were expanding were leading to more of the demise. It was like, I was told the other day, that "wrestling is wrestling," in so many words, that if you could see Atlanta Falcons games six times a week on television that you wouldn't go to see them. Well, before the Atlanta Falcons were a winner, you're right. But also, I wouldn't have even watched them on television unless I didn't have anything else to watch. But when Jerry Glanville came to town and the Atlanta Falcons won 11 ballgames, now they got two Monday night games next year, some important games, the crowds are excited to see them. I would pay to see the 49ers play, I'd go to see the Dallas Cowboys play under Jimmy Johnson. The people at the end of the Landry regime were playing in front of empty stadiums. Now it's picked up. Look at the Chicago Bulls. Every time they play they're on television, all over the country on WGN, and yet their home crowd stands are full because they have a superstar and they have created a winning group around him.

Keller: And wherever the Bulls go, they sell out.

Watts: That's right. The Dallas Mavericks's only sellout of the year was against the Bulls. Wrestling is not "wrestling." Mexican food is not all Mexican food. Some of it is bad. Television-oriented people think "all wrestling is wrestling." So all they look at is the difference in the graphics and the lighting—the show, as far as a production, and not the product.

Keller: How would you explain to a casual fan, a fan who may not have ever attended a live pro wrestling event or who may not see very much on TV, how you are going to make WCW fundamentally different from the WWF?

Watts: Well, that ours is not going to be a cartoon.

Keller: Does that mean eliminating all outrageous ring-entrance music or gimmicks?

Watts: I don't care what they wear on their way to the ring. They can wear anything they want until they get to the ring. They can be as flamboyant as they want as long as it's ring paraphernalia. I'm not going to have people in combat boots wrestling in the ring. No one is going to wrestle while wearing slacks, a shirt, sunglasses, and a tie. In the years I wrestled, no one would have worn that because I would have hung them by it. We're going to get back to the toughness. We've got Gordy and Dr. Death and the Steiners, Van Vader, Rick Rude, Sting, we've got some awesome people. We've got

Ron Simmons, what a great athlete he is. He's never been truly put into a position to carry a load. Hell, with his background and athletic ability, you've got to take people like that and put them in a position to test them. See if they can come to the front.

Keller: How about the light-heavyweight division?

Watts: I'm really excited about that. I never was a strictly super-heavyweight type promoter. That's a Vince McMahon steroid creation. Some of my top guys were the Rock & Roll Express; you never see a bad match with Brad Armstrong. It's 236 that they set for the division. I always featured Danny Hodge in his prime. I don't think everybody has to be a steroid clone. In fact, Turner Broadcasting has a policy against steroids. So there are all sizes and one thing you're going to pick up with the smaller guys is more speed. They're going to do some things the biggest guys can't. I mean Steve Austin is not a big kid and look at what he does. And Dusty Rhodes's son. I don't care what anybody thinks because of his dad overshadowing him, he's got a wrestling background, he's an up-and-comer. And Johnny B. Badd. I haven't seen him in person yet, but from seeing him on TV, there's potential there. There's a lot of marketability. I just haven't had a chance to sit down with everybody, but gosh there's a lot of awesome people there. Bobby Eaton, he's not a big guy and he's always been a tough athlete. Arn Anderson isn't especially big, but he's phenomenal. So I think there's a mix, so we want to have something for everybody.

Keller: What factors did you consider that made you agree to come back into wrestling? You said you were happy with what you were doing.

Watts: I really was. Mostly the challenge and the fact that I was embarrassed for the business. People would see me as a retired wrestler and compare me to today, and hell's bells, it was embarrassing. Also, the fact that I've put my life into something that's being destroyed, so here I have the opportunity to show the way I think wrestling should be. It was like when we talked when you didn't even know I was considering this, you said the same things I believed about wrestling. The fans want to see wrestling, winners and losers. They want to see it between the people and know that people are going to show up. They want to see passion and exertion. They want to see a contest. The colorful aspects I've always loved. We've got people over here that can do a lot of that stuff.

Keller: Do you think you can take TV ratings from 2.1 to 4.1 and sell out arenas?

Watts: We're gonna start selling out arena venues, starting with the Omni. My gosh, the Omni is our Madison Square Garden and the last Omni event was somewhere around 1,300 paid in a 16,000 seat building. That's appalling. Atlanta and TBS have always had such a tremendous following and TBS has always been committed to wrestling. I think the management of WCW was trying to make it a television company because they perceived the day of the

Steve Austin is not a big kid and look at what he does. And Dusty Rhodes's son. I don't care what anybody thinks because of his dad, he's got a wrestling background, he's an up-and-comer. And Johnny B. Badd. I haven't seen him in person yet, but from seeing him on TV, there's potential there. There's a lot of marketability. I just haven't had a chance to sit down with everybody, but gosh there's a lot of awesome people there.

arena was over for the reason I just told you that there was so much wrestling on TV, no one would pay to see it live. I just beg to differ. We told them that without arenas and people getting emotionally involved in our sport, your television ratings are going to go too, and then you're pay-per-views are going to be diluted and everything's going to drop off. If you get back to the basics where you build the arenas and reestablish your credibility with the fans, that's going to build the ratings and other sales. It all builds together.

Keller: You've said it's going to take you a couple of months to really dig your hands in promotion and have strong influence. How long do you want it to take from, say, July 1 on to see significant change at the Omni and other arenas and in TV ratings?

Watts: That's a hard thing for me to factor. We're up to June 27 with things that are canned for our shows. So July is just going to start to see the first steps we take, so it's going to take some time. Plus, you've got to assess the damage. It's not going to be overnight where people say just because I have a magic wand and say this is the way it's going to be that they're going to believe it. They've heard that story before, they've heard that song and dance. We've got to go back in and start battling. We've got to go to these venues and start battling and letting the people know, by gosh, it's back and you're going to get your money's worth because I'll tell you as far as I'm concerned the wrestling fans have to get more

than their dollar's worth. They can't come and get screwed.

Keller: You're talking a lot about not wanting the fans to be screwed. How much of a hand are you going to have in what Dusty Rhodes had been doing as booker? You'll obviously have veto power and can decide the overall direction of the company. What about the actual execution?

Watts: Well, it can't all be laid off on Dusty because no matter who was booking this, they really couldn't be successful. They had too many things working against them and there was a fickleness about the direction. So the directions and the concepts could change over night and everything would get thrown out. You were working for someone who didn't know anything about wrestling, and they could come in and overnight change their whole concept over what they perceived it then was.

Dusty has always had a genius and a flair. The thing with Dusty and I will be like it was with Eddie Graham and I, we will be discussing and we will be working together on everything. Naturally, Eddie Graham, when I was with him, was my boss, therefore I had to be within his scope and within his direction. That's about how I'd analyze this. Dusty's not that far off at all. He was doing what he had to do for what was asked of him. Consequently, it was very anguishing to never know where you stood, never know what was next. So what do you do? You try to survive, you try to appease, when all the time you're getting the blame for it. You can't blame a thing like this on one person.

The buck will stop at the top with me, though. It will get blamed on me if it doesn't work. It's like you said in the *Torch*, I've critiqued the situation and it's "put up or shut up." I've been given the opportunity to do what I can do and to try to fit into the corporate world here.

Keller: Do you believe there was any apprehensiveness on Dusty Rhodes's part when you were hired, such as feeling threatened or feeling power was being taken from him?

Watts: The problem was there wasn't a period of time for that to happen to him because he didn't know until the morning he walked in here, Tuesday morning. Nobody knew. When it was told to him, I imagine his jaw dropped to a certain extent, but then it was a very short time before I came in and he and I were left together. I told him exactly how I felt about things and it's been unbelievable how rejuvenated and excited he is because he knows I understand his problems and I'm not a threat to his job.

Although, as anybody who knows me, you know you have to be accountable. That's a thing we have to put back in here is accountability to our talent. They have to be accountable to the heads of our different functions here. They can't just be a "Monday morning quarterback" and blame it on the other guy because we're going to form a team. Everybody can be taken higher by this team but they can't as an individual. It has not been successful for anybody. I believe Dusty has been relieved. I'm sure when it was first announced he wondered where he stood because

by the history here, it was always a replacement of the bookers. I never was just interested in the booking job because the booking job was the kiss of death. You were sandbagged before you got started. He realized I wasn't a threat to his job, that he is going to have no excuses because he is going to have all the help that he can have within this vehicle here. It's like our event coordinators are going to learn the same thing. Our people are going to learn that when we go in for an event, all the parameters have to be in place before we go. We don't want to be running an event just to be running an event. We've inherited a lot of bad bookings and a lot of bad situations that we'll have to live with until we get by. All these things have to be in order and all these people have to be accountable.

Keller: What are some of those bad inheritances?

Watts: Venues that have no television to support them. Venues with poor ratings. We've got an event I believe next week in Los Angeles. I mean, what a terrible time to have that event. Just like the last Omni. That was a horrible time, basically, because the situation that happened nationally can be devastating. I've seen what's happened in a national crisis before. I remember when there was a crisis in New Orleans, we had to cancel the SuperDome. We're locked into some bad situations.

Keller: Would you be in favor of cutting down the schedule a lot?

Watts: Yes, the television schedule. The pay-per-view schedule, too, we're overexposed.

Keller: How will Turner Home Entertainment react to you wanting to cut back pay-per-views?

Watts: I think Turner Home Entertainment is wanting this division to become a success. I think they've made a commitment and I think the people they've put in charge of it have made a commitment to try to let somebody that understands wrestling have a shot at doing it. That's why I'm here. Let's face it, I wouldn't be here if everything was happy. Hell, they've tried everybody else (laughs). I didn't come here because I needed a job. You ask, then why did I take it? Because I love the challenge and I love the business. The other thing is I think this could be a big division for Turner Broadcasting. Ted's set the standard for every other industry he's entered, why shouldn't he set the standard for wrestling? If I can prove my efforts here to my bosses and to Ted Turner that I can run a major division here and make it important to him, well that's a big move. You never know what can happen with Turner Broadcasting behind you. There's a lot of things that can happen. To me, it's an exciting time.

Keller: How important is it for your fans to not just be entertained, but to suspend their disbelief also?

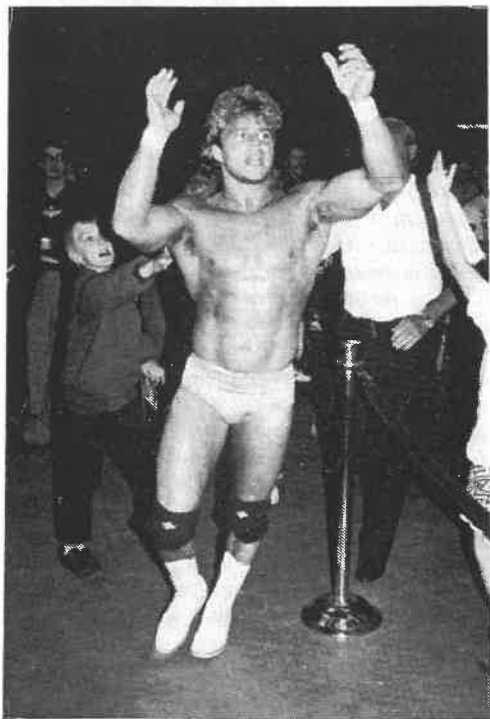
Watts: I can't change anybody's mind about what's already out there. It is entertainment, but we're not going to sit there and blatantly promote it as a cartoon. We're going to get back to the basics where guys are in shape and they're

kicking ass. If they get hurt, they get hurt. This is a tough-ass sport and you'll just have to see. That's why I appreciate you all. Give your candid reactions. If you don't see a difference, then I haven't done anything until you see a difference.

We could debate that other aspect all night, but it's kind of like if you're cheating on your wife, and she suspects it, but she doesn't know for sure, then she still loves you because she really doesn't want to be confronted with that as a reality. But as soon as she catches you or as soon as you confess and tell her, no matter what, the damage is done and the relationship has a hard time ever being what it was. Well, that's kind of like wrestling. You know, everybody has always had their opinion of it, one way or the other, and certainly we can't change what's already out there and we're not going to try. But even when people had their opinion, they saw wrestling they enjoyed and loved and would pay to come see. I think McMahon has gone beyond that and his house gates are down and his pay-per-views are down and I think he's very vulnerable right now. We've got a great opportunity right now, but if he was going down, we were going down worse. So certainly we had no chance of survival by copying something that was already in a downtrend. What's going to be interesting is how this all comes out.

I'll tell you what, when you come to the events, you may think what you want about it, but you're not going to know until you see the event what the outcome's going to be.

Keller: When you talk about the wrestlers working a lot harder, and "if they get injured, then they get injured," if you also eliminate the guaranteed contracts and add incentives based on attendance, if wrestlers get hurt, are you in favor of some kind of compensation for the time they're out?



Brian Pillman

Watts: Number one, it's too early to even address those issues because we couldn't base them on incentive right now because there's not any incentive out there. So the wrestlers we have we're very glad to have and their compensation is what we're inheriting, so we're going to go with that. But we're going to expect them to be on time and we're going to expect them to be ready to go in the ring. No, if a guy gets hurt, I have no problem with him being compensated because he was being hurt in an endeavor for this company. I would take exception to a guy who's not hurt that bad and him milking that advantage which can be done. But, there's an old thing in the National Football League. You play hurt and you've got to learn to play in pain. The top stars, like Lawrence Taylor, you go to any of them, they play hurt and injured all the time. Most of the time the fans don't even know how badly hurt they are. That comes from a pride in competing. That's what used to be in wrestling. Heck, most wrestlers couldn't pass a physical, but by gosh they went. What's happened is because of that lack of incentive and motivation, due to them not being able to affect anything in a real way, some have relied more on that because they don't care and they're getting paid anyway. Whatever they've done for whatever reason they've done it, I don't blame any of them. I have no way of really addressing those issues at this point.

Keller: You talked about how guarantees have hurt the sport. Is that something you're going to look into changing?

Watts: When we get in the position where a guy is confident that there is a true possibility for him to work on incentive, then we'll look into it. I think you're always going to need to offer some kind of a guarantee for a quality and marketable piece of talent. But I think they'll be more open to basing it on some type of incentives. But how could you base anything on incentives right now? So I think it's premature to get into overly considering that. I certainly wouldn't want talent to think I'm out to ruin their current type of contract or anything else. I'm not. I think when most guys want an incentive is when we have something to base it on. If a guy's got competitive juices, he's gonna want an incentive. I would want an incentive. If we get to that point, we're making the kind of money they're getting guaranteed and we're going onward and upward, then naturally he would want an incentive. The only time they want a guarantee is when they don't think they can achieve what would be an incentive base. I'm not here to hurt the wrestlers; I want them to make more money with the company also getting a return on its incentive.

Keller: When you talk about wrestling having to be the way it used to be in some ways, what are some of the ways that you're going to avoid falling into a pattern of promoting based on something ten years ago that's unrealistic now? What are some of the changes you will have to make in your promoting style that used to make you successful?

The buck will stop at the top with me, though. It will get blamed on me if it doesn't work. It's like you said in the Torch, I've critiqued the situation and it's "put up or shut up." I've been given the opportunity to do what I can do and to try to fit into the corporate world here.

Watts: I want you to watch that unfold and you commentate on that because I understand where you're coming from. You want to know, "Gosh, can you back something up from ten, fifteen, twenty years ago?" No, you can't. First of all, the athletes wouldn't understand that, nor would the people. That's not what I'm saying. But I want you to see what we do and tell me your impressions as we go on. The first step is to get the contests in the ring between the athletes and not between the ineptness or taking advantage of the referee where he is always the bouncing ball to be bounced wherever they want him to be bounced so they can affect the outcome they want to affect. I don't think that every match having the people run in, well, the fans don't buy that. Heck, I was a big person who pushed those parameters at the time and it doesn't make it right now.

Keller: There is quite a bit of criticism within the wrestling business over what is an unclear situation regarding you allegedly attempting to renegotiate several wrestlers' contracts?

Bill Watts: With Brian Pillman, he was told that he was at a part of his career that could go either way, therefore he has a contract that pays a huge amount of money that is guaranteed. I have no problem with that. Then he has some bonus clauses in there. All I did was offer him some money versus those bonus clauses in what I thought was a fair offer. Then I said it would be a simple thing: "You can give us some consideration with your bonus clauses, then we can position you possibly better and take the time to develop you. If you don't, what is our motivation to putting the time and cost into developing you?"

But he gets everything that's in his contract. We haven't asked anybody to get what's not in their contract.

Keller: Is there a clause in the wrestlers' contracts that says the promoter will push them to the best of their ability? If that clause is in there, would it be legal to bargain a push

Generally, most wrestlers are kneejerkers and they don't know anything about the overall concept. Instead of concentrating on the positives, how fortunate they are to be making the money they are—because they sure as hell couldn't make it doing anything else, they couldn't do it teaching school, they couldn't make it being a coach, they couldn't make it pumping gas, they need to concentrate on how lucky they are to be there.

vs. giving up bonuses?

Watts: I don't think that clause is in there. That sounds like a far-fetched clause, because who would determine what's in whose best ability?

Keller: That could be tough to gauge.

Watts: You see, so much of that sh— you get is like your deal (in last week's *Torch*) about me bankrupting WCW and taking the talent and starting my own deal again. What a f—in' ridiculous concept that is... Let me ask you this. Where the hell do you think Sting or Rick Rude are going to go to make the kind of money they're (making here)? Those guys are phenomenal athletes, they're great cornerstones, and I don't know that either one of them are pissed off. They sure haven't told me that.

Keller: Did you meet with Rick Rude to talk about the contract?

Watts: The deal with Rick Rude—again, that's in the personal finances—I just offered him a deal that he may or may not want, but I told him it was completely up to his option, no strings attached. It was just if it would benefit him. It was a private matter between him and me, but I haven't asked him to do a damn thing and I haven't threatened him to do a damn thing. I told him, "If this would help you and you would like to do something like this, it may be an opportune time. Surely you don't do anything that's not in your best interest."

Keller: Was that same attitude presented to someone who was lesser on the scale, such

as Brian Pillman?

Watts: The only place people are created equal is in the Constitution. Not in life or in business. Everybody's not the same. Pillman's not a Rick Rude, Pillman's not a Sting. Just like Deion Sanders can play two sports and hold up two organizations, while another quarterback may be lucky to be there. Business is not a democracy. People are a commodity and they have value. We have just so many positions that we can push actively. Sometimes you may have to have some consideration in order to be in the picture. We've got a lot of guys. Brian Pillman is a fine, young athlete, but he's not a proven commodity in any way, shape, or form as far as drawing money.

Keller: So if there was an agreed upon situation...

Watts: If Lee Iacocca walked into Chrysler and said, "I need this group, this group, and this group, I gotta negotiate, I gotta cut corners, I gotta save money," well that's a tough-ass pill to swallow. A lot of people accepted a lot of bitter pills and the company is still in business. Companies like Eastern Airlines and TWA, the ones that didn't do it, they're no longer in business. So what I'm saying to ya' is we may approach some people and say, "Man, some of the things in your contract we feel are a little bit exorbitant and we'd like to talk to you about it. If they don't, they're not gonna get out of their contract. It's up to them. We're gonna live up to our end, they can live up to their end. How many times we use them is up to us.

Keller: One of the criticisms that has come out of this is that, "Bill Watts is asking people to take less money to help save the company money, but also because he gets a certain amount of money from what he saves TBS." That is something you talked about...

Watts: That is a crock of sh—.

Keller: When you first got hired, you said that your contract was still being worked out. Are you on a base salary or do you have incentives worked in?

Watts: I'm signed.

Keller: Is it a guarantee or is it based on incentives? That's the key thing.

Watts: I don't think that's anybody's business but mine and the guy I worked it out with. But it's a crock of sh— that I get a bonus for any amount of money I've saved TBS. That's bullshit—.

Keller: But you won't say whether it is a base salary or whether there are incentives built in?

Watts: I don't think it's anybody's business but mine.

Keller: That's fine. That's your prerogative.

Watts: I'm just telling you the point you asked is bullshit—.

Keller: It's out there, so I just wanted to make sure (you had a chance to respond).

Watts: I don't give a sh—. There's a lot of

sh— out there. Earlier we went over everything that's bullshit— that's out there. Generally, most wrestlers are kneejerkers and they don't know anything about the overall concept. They have all these ways they could solve the business overnight and they haven't sat down to know where the money's made or what departments (you have to work with) or how it's done. Instead of concentrating on the positives, how fortunate they are to be making the money they are—because they sure as hell couldn't make it doing anything else, they couldn't do it teaching school, they couldn't make it being a coach, they couldn't make it pumping gas, they need to concentrate on how lucky they are to be there.

Now the fact is that the company wants to tighten its belt like most companies are doing in the United States today. A lot of corporations are doing that, asking people to take cuts, or to do this or do that to help the company. You better concentrate on helping the company—we'll be here, we will go through this, everything is going to go just fine, we put our business plan together. Now we've decided to talk to some people that we believe may be a little bit out of line on certain things. We are going to offer them certain deals. If they don't do it, the only thing is we might not invest quite as much because the extra we'd have to do may not be worth the return. We'll certainly make sure they'll make the money they've signed for.....

You've got to understand the mentality of most wrestlers. First of all, they don't believe the operating conditions are what they are. They think that TBS is making a fortune off this show. That's step one. Step two, most of them have forgotten from where they came. It's skewed out there a little.

I understand Brian Pillman. Hell, he got a hell of a deal with a guy (Kip Frey), who in my personal opinion, didn't know a damn thing about what he was doing and in a few short months gave contracts out with a bunch of guaranteed bonuses that are ridiculous. So we are trying to come to people and negotiate... some of those (bonuses), not the base pay. Or people that we can't use. Let's say there's a guy we don't need and let's say he's got a contract for another year. Now you see, if I was in that position where I wasn't needed and the company came to me and said, "Look, we'll give you x-amount of dollars for the remainder of your contract in a lump sum." All right, if we do that, you're released and we go on. To me, I'd look at it as a double advantage. I got the money up-front instead of over a year, year-and-a-half payout, whatever the deal—let's say it was discounted 40 percent, 30 percent, 25 percent, whatever it's discounted—I got that money as cash in hand and I can take that money and go make another deal with someone else and go to work. So anything I pick up is a plus. Plus, how often do you get to accumulate large amounts of cash in one payment? You could maybe buy a hunk of land, pay your house off, or buy a business. See what I mean? So to me, it makes sense. It's just a negotiation. If they don't want to do it, they're still gonna get paid. Nobody at TBS has said we're not going to honor the contract.

Now then, we can only push so many people.

Let me tell you something, Jimmy Garvin's paid his dues, too. Right now we just don't have the place to fit him in. Michael Hayes is being used in the broadcast aspect. See what I mean? There are a lot of guys sitting out there. And Brian Pillman was sitting on the bottom not doing a damn thing and we figured a way to pick him up and teach and to develop him. With the time-track, it would punish us to do so. Therefore we're willing to live up to everything he's got in his contract. I was asking him to take a consideration where he had cash in his hand—a portion of it, it didn't affect anything else—and he's put in a position where he could learn and gain more experience and become a more valuable person. If that's a negative, sonofabitch, I don't know.

But let me tell you something, you need to go back to the first grade with a lot of these guys and get a board out and do the basic math because they don't understand it. Well, I'm not upset about it, I'm just trying to take the time to teach them. Then the next time they understand it, and they say "okay," and you act on the verbal agreement, the handshake, whatever, and the next day they want to change their mind. So I mean, basically speaking—we don't need to belabor this anymore, I want off of this point—it's just there's nothing here we're going to do anybody out of. We're certainly going to try to negotiate positioning with some people. That goes on in any major organization.

Keller: The one point I'm unclear on is how is it detrimental to push, say Brian Pillman, if he does not forgo his bonus clauses?

Watts: Then you would have (to look at what) the bonuses were affecting, which is Brian's business and my business.

Keller: So if you push Brian x—amount of degrees, then that could increase his bonuses?

Watts: That's not hard to figure. That's basic. But, you see, to him, "By gosh, I signed this thing. I got this thing and I want to keep it." Then I said, "That's fine. Then keep it. I didn't tell you not to keep it. It's just that what it takes to push a guy with the way his contract is structured costs us a bunch more money. I mean, let me tell you something. He's not drawing the money that's configured to what he's being paid now because it was out of skew where people didn't know what they were doing.

If Brian Pillman is with this organization or not with this organization, it's not going to make a hill of beans. But if we want to build him into that kind of guy, all I wanted him to do is take that into consideration. Then we will take the time and investment into building him. At the end of that time, he'll either be a better guy, or it didn't work out. But basically speaking, Brian is not going to make or break this organization. But Sting or Rick Rude, they're a proven commodity. I have nothing but the most respect for both of them and their contracts are great. The point I was talking to Rick Rude (about) was totally different. It had nothing to do with the Brian Pillman situation in any shape or form, it was not controversial between him and me, it wasn't a threat between him and me. It was just

a deal where I saw a way, if it was an advantage to him, it might be an advantage to us. If not, no problem. He certainly wasn't upset about it.

Keller: What about a discussion with Sting concerning contracts? Did that take place?

Watts: No. I talked to him on the phone today, but everything is fine with Sting. As far as I'm concerned, Sting is probably the most proven cornerstone we have here. I tell you, a lot of the guys with this same bullsh—going around, they're reacting to the bullsh—, not the facts. And a lot of the facts have been misrepresented to them.

Keller: Obviously I expect you to represent your side the best you can and I expect the wrestlers to represent their side as best they can, but...

Watts: The difference is I know both sides and they don't. They only know one perspective and what they know, they then hear from other guys who misrepresent....

Keller: But when you hear about morale being low...

Watts: Sh—, morale has been up and down and sideways in the wrestling business since the day I got in it. Most of it is due to the kneejerk reactions and guys relying on the negatives instead of the positives. Next thing you know, morale is low for Vince McMahon. A guy's making \$400,000 a year and the morale's low. They have to work for it. (You hear), "God, I'm travelling too much." You've got guys who after they work four times in a week, they're too tired. So when they tell me that, I say, "Sh—, kid, you're spoiled." Morale is a factor that changes daily or weekly. Two weeks ago, their morale was great. This week their morale is down because they all get into one thing or another. That is as changeable in the wrestling business as anything. Most of the time when morale is down it's because of a misunderstanding or because somebody is misrepresenting what is being said to them and they misperceive it as a threat to all of them.

Keller: If morale was low—not necessarily "rightfully low," but still low—is that something you would try to address? Would you try to raise morale? The impression I get is a lot of managerial tactics used by promoters like you is confrontational—and maybe that's the way wrestlers have to be treated—but how do you address morale if it's low?

Watts: You take the issues, first of all, that are being misrepresented and you try to tell them the truth about the issue and often times you don't see them every day or even every week. So you figure that if something is really bad out there, before they get all blown out of shape, that they'd at least call you and say they want to come in and talk to you. But instead they go out and talk to everybody else. That's just indicative of sports today.

I think any management team, whether it's in football or anything else, has to enforce rules and regulations and discipline, and they also have to deal with guys on an individual basis. Certainly the same guy doesn't get the same

I was embarrassed for the business. People would see me as a retired wrestler and compare me to today, and hell's bells, it was embarrassing. Also the fact that I've put my life into something that's being destroyed, so here I have the opportunity to show the way I think wrestling should be. The fans want to see wrestling, winners and losers. They want to see passion and exertion. They want to see a contest.

deal as Neon Deion. The same guy doesn't get the same as Mark Rypien. It's disruptive and everything else, but that's just part of what goes into it. But certainly if morale is bad, first of all I want to know if it's something that's bad based on something that's real or based on something that's perceived. Yeah, we'll address it. We always do. We've addressed it as we went on and just sometimes you may be out of sync the day you catch them with it because all of a sudden they've been on the road and nobody's been there to hold their hand.

Keller: Would you say that sometimes when morale is low—which wrestlers perceive as a good reason and you perceive as a bad reason—maybe you don't handle it as well as you should?

Watts: I never said I was infallible. I've never said that.

Keller: Then do you try to correct your infallibilities?

Watts: Yeah. Everything is different. Again, I see the business from one perspective and they see it from another. They think maybe the way I see it is different on one issue. Since they don't know the overall picture, they always have the answer to it on a simplistic basis, but it's not that simple anymore. I didn't say that I've ever done everything right. It's a continuous situation and certainly, too, if I'm wrong, I'll admit it. I have admitted it. I admitted I was wrong on the top rope rule. What we're saying is bygosh, the fans reacted, and we're going to take that into consideration.

REFLECTIONS ON TORCH TALKS

Mike Tenay: At the time of this interview, Tenay was an independent reporter. The subject of becoming a full-time wrestling announcer wasn't even talked about. Tenay's national radio show was broadcast before the Internet boom made insider wrestling available to the masses. He had been involved in newsletters and fan club bulletins since the '60s. His crossover to announcing came because wrestling promotions began to see profit in hiring reporters to do reporter-like duties for their 900 lines. It's the same way former TORCH columnist Mark Madden got into WCW—through doing 900 number number updates. The transition for Tenay from 900 number updates to on-air announcing full time may have more difficult for him than others because he had to shift from straight reporting to promoting storylines. As the interview shows, though, even before he worked inside the industry, he gave politically safe answers as not to offend anyone. That may be why he has been able to be successful "on the other side of the fence."

Lou Thesz: This was a short interview conducted right after Japan's UWFI promotion ran a PPV in the United States. Thesz hoped at the time that a more realistic style of worked wrestling would become popular in the United States. The chances seemed decent since attendance was so low for the established promotions in the U.S. Thesz is one of the most influential wrestlers of this century in virtually every aspect of the sport. He was legitimately virtually unbeatable in real fights while he was champion and there is a chip on his shoulder to a certain extent that pro wrestling evolved into pure entertainment where amateur wrestling skills were no longer required to be a world champion wrestler. The UWFI was a chance in his lifetime to see the style of wrestling he most enjoyed experience a resurgence. Needless to say, that hasn't happened yet and pro wrestling has become something further from his ideal than ever.

Jesse Ventura: If you compare his book to this interview, there are no significant inconsistencies to his story. That's nice to know because the book was written in 1999, seven years after this interview took place. He was in the midst of litigation of the royalties to videotape sales by the WWF with his commentary on it. He would end up with a million dollar judgement in his favor. The one inconsistency I found between his words then versus today has to do with his attitude toward changes in pro wrestling. In the interview, when discussing Bruno Sammartino, he didn't have much sympathy for Bruno's criticism of wrestling changing since he was involved. Ventura in recent months has been active in denouncing the current wrestling scene because it has become more geared toward spectacular stunts. In his defense, his rationale for criticizing wrestling doesn't have to do with him wanting things the way they were in his day, but rather in the interest of the safety of wrestlers. I'm sure Vince McMahon would argue that it would have been nice if Ventura would have brought up some of the examples of McMahon being a caring boss during his media interviews after the Owen Hart tragedy... This interview, although not as exhaustive as some others in this book, could be considered a "missing chapter" from his book since he didn't get into nearly as much detail in his book about wrestling as he did in this interview.

LARRY ZBYSZKO

Larry Zbyszko is best known for two things: his mouth and his 1980 Feud of the Year with Bruno Sammartino in the late-'70s and early-'80s. Since that time in the WWF, he has wrestled for the NWA, AWA, NWA, and AWA again. He held the WWWF Tag Team Titles with Tony Garea in 1978-'79 before losing to the Valiants. When he turned heel in 1980, he was voted Most Improved Wrestler and Most Hated Wrestler. His WWF stint culminated with a cage match against his mentor, Bruno Sammartino, at Shea Stadium in front of over 35,000 fans, a record gate at that time. The Wrestler Observer's "Who's Who Book" reported Zbyszko made \$24,000 for that one match. After leaving the WWF after a falling out with Vince McMahon Sr., he left the sport for nearly a year and vacationed around the world.

He returned to the wrestling scene and purchased the NWA National Title based out of Georgia from Killer Brooks. He won the AWA America's Title and feuded with Bob Backlund and Sgt. Slaughter over it. Then he moved back to the NWA and defeated Barry Windham for the Western States Heritage Title. He then left the NWA without losing that title and in February 1989, defeated Tom Zenk who was the last foe in a battle royal for the vacant AWA Title. He lost the AWA Title to Mr. Saito in February of 1990 in front of over 60,000 fans in Tokyo, but won it back in March at the St. Paul Civic Center.

He held that title until being stripped of it on Dec. 23's AWA All Star Wrestling program for not defending the title in Japan. In reality, Zbyszko was headed to WCW and has already wrestled for them. In the following "Torch Talk" with Mr. Zbyszko conducted on Dec. 28, 1990 he discusses his recent entrance into WCW and events that led up to that.

Wade Keller: Let's start at the beginning. How did you get involved in pro wrestling?

Larry Zbyszko: Oh, God, that's an old story. Years ago I saw wrestling on TV. I saw Sammartino and he really impressed me as a kid. I always wanted to grow up to be one. So I wrestled in high school.... And then after I graduated, (Bruno) started me out. Basically, I just walked into his back yard and introduced myself when I was about 16. And he took me under his wing and we worked out a lot. And I started working out a lot with him and he introduced me to a lot of the guys. Because he was big at the time, all the oldtimers in the wrestling business who would usually snog people—I mean, years ago you could not get into the wrestling business. And now a days it's like every goof tries it. Then everybody else started teaching me, names you wouldn't even know. John Foley, I worked out with for a year. He trained Karl Gotch.

Keller: Did Gito Mongol train you?

Zbyszko: Well, Gito (laughs) says he did sometimes. Gito had a ring set up in his barn and was one of the guys I used to work out with before when I used to ride Gito's horses—you know he

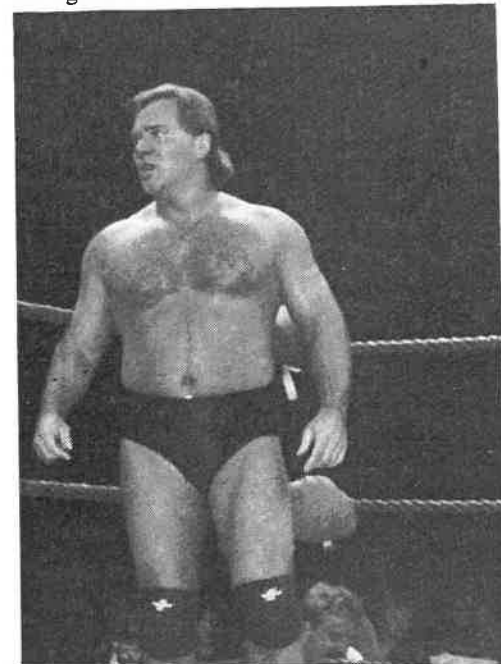
was like a buddy—and then it was me and Bill Eadie and a few other guys who never made it in the business. We used to work out together. I don't know if Gito taught anybody.

Keller: What are some of the memorable moments for you as a fan growing up that peaked your interest in wrestling?

Zbyszko: You know what the weird part was? Like I said, Bruno was like a big thing back then. He was like a god. Like Verne Gagne out there or the Crusher or whatever. One Sunday the folks dragged me off to church. I must've been 13. And we all get in the pew and I'm sitting there, ya' know, and I see this guy's hand next to me and it looks like a Gorilla. It's all big and hairy. I was sitting right next to Bruno. So the whole mass I stared at him like a goof. He looked like an ape, he was just so impressive. After church I hit him up for an autograph and I still have the church bulletin he gave me an autograph on. I was in about 8th grade. I still have that in my memorabilia. Then I remember I was yelling at him, "Good luck against the Beast." And a little later on after I got to know him and he started me in wrestling, he told me he remembered that and every time I was yelling, "Good luck against the Beast," he was cringing and trying to run to his car.

Keller: Do you find now that you are involved in wrestling that you are still a fan of the sport?

Zbyszko: Well, I tell ya', I must be because what I see being promoted, the "wrestlers" I see being promoted, it really makes me want to puke. So I guess deep inside I am a fan and the reason I consider myself and am considered by a lot of people so damn good at it is because I love it so much. Like the WWF, I can't even watch it. It's not allowed on in my house because it's so stupid. Even Turner, whom I'm associated with now, well, at least they're wising up. They're realizing these steroid clowns don't mean anything. Have them go to American Gladiators where they belong.



Larry Zbyszko

Sting is lucky because he's a young and vulnerable type of champion. He was being promoted and given opportunities because of the make-up and that big goofy look. While in reality, he just doesn't know what the hell he's doing yet.

Keller: You mention you are with WCW now. What are your plans in that organization?

Zbyszko: It was a weird little thing. I just sort of eased my way in because they've got so many internal problems. A few people got in power that really think the world of me as a talent, so I eased my way in. I don't think too much of the talent there. The Steiners are tough kids. Arn Anderson's a tough guy. Barry Windham's a hell of an athlete.

Keller: What do you think of Sting as their champion?

Zbyszko: I think Sting is the luckiest man in the world outside of Hulk Hogan.

Keller: Why do you say that?

Zbyszko: He's lucky because he's a young and vulnerable type of champion... He got a push because in terms of being a wrestler... Sting was being promoted and given opportunities because of the make-up and that big goofy look. While in reality, he just doesn't know what the hell he's doing yet. I mean, I could throw him all over the place.

There's another obstacle to overcome, because I'm a free agent. Turner kind of needs names because they need to get ratings and there's nobody left in this wrestling business. I don't think they trust me a lot. My reputation with promoters isn't like the greatest in the world ever since I held up McMahon who deserved it. It's kind of touchy, because I want to go for the hold. So I'm just going to shoot my mouth off and try to disturb things and make sure people know "Larryland" has come to "TeddyTown." We'll see what I can push these promoter into.

Keller: When you worked for the AWA, were you ever frustrated with the lack of wrestling dates?

Zbyszko: I tell ya', I've been doing this 15, 16 years and I've had some good years and I've had some sh---y years, but the good years I had I made a hell of a lot of money, so I've always been in a position where I didn't have to take no sh---. And the deal I had with Gagne was, even though he didn't run anything because that is where he lost money, he made money off his TVs, so I hit him up for so much a week. So I was making money for not wrestling, so I didn't want to wrestle. Then I went off to Japan and made my deals and had

some independent shots, and that was all extra money. I don't know what everyone else makes in this business, but not having road expenses because I didn't wrestle much and being home everyday, I made as much if not more than just about anybody in this business. I loved it. I played golf all summer and worked out hard. I weigh 240 now and I benched 410 the other day at the gym, and that's without steroids. I'm anxious to get back into the bigger time. I've got a bigger opportunity now with Turner because he's got three networks.

Keller: How many more years do you plan to wrestle?

Zbyszko: I'm playing it by fate. I haven't wrestled much in the last couple of years and made money anyway, so I haven't been hurt. I've been really lucky in terms of injuries. But that comes from being in shape for real and knowing what I'm doing. I don't climb up to the top rope and jump off to try to hit some guy and bust my knee up because I don't have to do that. That ain't wrestling. I don't know. I feel good. What made me feel good is that people at Turner appreciate me that much because they recognize the talent. As long as I feel good and I make a lot of money, I'm going to do it. If that means 40 or 45, but I'm not going to go much... I want to walk out of this business with my head up high and shaking my ass because I'm still in one piece. We'll play it by ear.

Keller: Would you ever like to get into managing or be a player/coach?

Zbyszko: Once I've done wrestling, to be a manager, I wouldn't want to jump in and do it myself. I couldn't sit there and watch someone else. I'm too much of a perfectionist. I might like to stay involved in the wrestling business. Maybe I'll still be a part of it, who knows? You never know. Knowing me, I might end up running Ted Turner's organization.

Keller: And take Jim Herd's job?

Zbyszko: I don't want that. That's too hectic.

Keller: What do you think of Dusty Rhodes?

Zbyszko: Dusty Rhodes, gee. I think he had his heyday some years ago. He was a tough guy and I hear he had some health problems, but I think Dusty stayed in it a few years too long. He's a witty guy, a smart man, he's a very clever bastard and was a tough son of a bitch. He's a naturally big guy. The only thing that I didn't, like, get off on Dusty was when he went to the WWF. He spent too many years of being good to wash out a commode for Vince McMahon.

Keller: Do you think Dustin will run into the same problems David Sammartino and Greg Gagne had as sons of famous wrestlers?

Zbyszko: Boy, I don't know. It's hard to be different. As soon as you say Dustin Rhodes, especially in the South where Dusty was big, they're gonna compare ya'. Dusty had a very flamboyant style and Dustin ain't gonna be able to copy that.

Keller: What do you think of Ric Flair?

Zbyszko: Ric Flair was one of the best. I think

Ric Flair is getting to that Golden Age which is going to face everybody. He was one of the best. You have to give the guy credit, he was a workhorse.

Keller: Harley Race?

Zbyszko: Harley Race is one of those guys who doesn't look it, but is a tough, tough son of a bitch. In terms of being a wrestler, he's maybe a step ahead of Ric Flair type of a guy. He was an old-fashioned tough son of a bitch. These Lex Ligers worry about how they look or if they get hurt or have a cold, they don't show up to wrestle. They're wimps compared to Flair and Race and the Bruisers and Verne and Bruno and them. These modern say so-called warriors? They're a bunch of wimps.

Keller: How about Jerry Lawler?

Zbyszko: Ah, he's wimp. I have no respect for Jerry Lawler whatsoever. In my opinion, he's a coward, he's a wimp, he's a jerk, he strictly out for Jerry Lawler, not the wrestling business.

Keller: How about Bob Backlund?

Zbyszko: In terms of business, he was an uncharismatic boring type of guy. In terms of being a wrestler, he was very good. He was a tremendous wrestler in tremendous shape. He just wouldn't draw ya' a dime because he wasn't a personality. plus the world wasn't right for a howdy doody. Bob Backlund was, in real life, he was so legitimately nice, he was boring. And that's exactly what he was on TV. Because in those days, guys were exactly what they were. People came to see Mad Dog because he was legitimately nuts. Verne was legitimately straight. Bruno was legitimately tough. And nowadays, nobody's legitimately anything because the promoters make them out to be jerks.

Keller: I don't know if you ever crossed paths with him, but how about another great talker, Paul E. Dangerously?

Zbyszko: A little too obnoxious for me. I mean I watch Paul E. Dangerously, he grates on my nerves. He goes out of his way like Roddy Piper. Piper's a really smart man, so why does he have to act like an idiot (with) that "sound effect" stuff. Because Piper's a tough guy, too. So, I guess that's more of McMahon's influence. I remember hearing Jesse Ventura complaining that Vince McMahon used to tell him what to say and that's why he doesn't work for him anymore.

Hey, talent's talent and all of these wrestlers are individuals and nuts and one way or another, because you have to be to do this, so if the promoters would just the guys be who they are, that's when people get into them. Then wrestling would be back to it's super heyday. Because of the cables and the networks and the pay-per-views, it would be bigger than ever, as big as football. McMahon won't let the guys be themselves. He tells them what to be. That's why I knock him. They try to be something they're not and that's why they do such sh-- ass jobs.

Keller: I remember shooting photos at the press conference you had with Bill Apter at the St. Paul Civic Center after you won the AWA battle royal for the world title. After your

interview with focused on the "living legend" theme, off camera you said, "Gee, I have to come up with something new." And next week LarryLand was born. How do you come up with ideas like LarryLand?

Zbyszko: (laughs) I really don't know. I basically am exactly on TV what I am in real life except I don't maybe throw so many tantrums out in public even though I'm kind of frustrated because life sucks. The whole thinking of mankind, in general—Christ, we're on the verge of World War III after the 15th and everybody walks around saying, "Let's make money" and are oblivious to what the hell life's all about. As far as I'm concerned, the reality everybody lives is upside down from what it should be. So I think upside down from what everybody else thinks.

The "Living Legend," the magazines started that after I retired Bruno Sammartino. I say in an interview I consider myself the new living legend because I beat this guy and they make it into something that lasts a year. I never thought to call myself that. I was doing some interview over in Minneapolis and I think I saw National Lampoon with "Wally World" or something, so I'm just watching a movie cracking up saying I think I'm going to make myself an amusement park and call it "LarryLand," just a little sh-- with the wife. So I say something and it cracks me up. Because there's no such thing as LarryLand or WallyWorld or Disneyland where they can rip you off and charge \$25 for a stuffed Mickey Mouse that costs them a dime. So I attack what everybody loves because in reality that's bullsh--. So I think that's what pisses people off about me, because I hit them where they live. I mean, I'm busting their bubbles of reality they're trying to block out.

So LarryLand, I say it once during an interview and afterward everybody goes berserk saying, "LarryLand, it's great!" I can see the reactions of just the camera people. If I do an interview where the camera guy has a smile on his face or he's jumping up and down going, "I love this," everybody will because he's just as simple as everyone else.

Keller: Have you always been a talented talker or did that develop over the years?

Zbyszko: Hmmm. You know what? It just happened that way. I mean, for years I used to be what some people call a fan favorite, Bruno's protegee. And the whole world was shocked when I turned on the man. I was all of a sudden in this position when I was with Bruno, it was instant bigtime. In order to get a big name in those days, you needed to either wrestle Bruno or Verne or Bockwinkel. So I couldn't get a shot as a fan favorite. So all of a sudden this animosity came out between me and Bruno and the people went berserk. I mean, it was such an outrageous amount of... they hated my guts. And the promoters took advantage of that to sell-out Shea Stadium in a day when it was unheard of. So I was just put in that position where I had to be good, but all I did at that time was what I do now. I spoke the truth. I said to the public things that had never been said before, such as Bruno was over the hill. Then he said if he didn't beat me, he'd retire. People went nuts. It was just a promotable thing and I had to be instantly good.

The thing is, after I did it, it was so much

myself. Nothing would make me happier than to go out in the world and tell people off all day because they're a bunch of schmucks. To make me happy, I would love to walk out and catch somebody scratching my car and beat the snot out of them because that's what kind of lowlifes we've got walking around here that think they're all great. If you want to see trash, watch Madonna. If you want to see an artist, watch me in the ring. That's the way I look at life.

As far as talking, yeah, I was just a natural. I'm a natural and I'm a smart bastard. But I knew what to say because I also kept my mouth shut and learned the wrestling business. I took a little bit from every great wrestler of the past. I took a little from Bruno, a little from Strongbow, a little bit from Verne, a little bit from Koloff, a little bit from The Crusher, what made them get over to the fans, what made them big-time. So I took a little bit from everybody. I knew what made them big-time.

Keller: The majority of the first decade of your career was spent working for Vince McMahon Sr. How would you describe him as a promoter, businessman, and person?

Zbyszko: I don't know about him as a person, but as a promoter, Vince Sr. was a smooth character. He was a classy old school wrestling promoter which (came) out of the carnival with a couple of cronies like Phil Zacko, Willy Gilzenberg, the really golden days of wrestling where everything was under the table, commissioners were slipped money that disappeared. It was a really shady business in those days. It was a lot of cash, not like you're dealing with corporate things now. And it was a fun business.

But Vince McMahon Sr. was one of these guys who might make in those days \$50,000 bucks a month and spend 49 of it because they had their gambling booth at the race track, cashmere coats, they went first class in New York. But it wasn't that big of a grossing business in those days, even though there was always cash rolling in. He was a real smooth character.

He was one of those guys where when he walked into a room, he had a presence. And if you needed anything, the first thing he'd say to you was, "Do ya' need any money, kid?" And if you said yes, he'll give you a few bucks. Then he'd walk into the back room and tell Skaaland to fire ya'. So it was really a way of life in those days that really is gone forever now. Shades of a Nick Gulas, Roy Shire type of territory. He was a classy, shrewd guy.

Keller: What led to your departure from the WWF?

Zbyszko: I wrestled for him for years and made a lot of money. Today, the WWF, I just don't need to deal with and I don't like what they do. When I left originally, it was just time to go. At that point I had been wrestling many years straight. And I just made a hell of a lot of money in the last couple years with Bruno. I didn't leave, I just took a year off. I worked out, I went to Japan a little bit. I took a vacation, went to Mexico and Hawaii, saw half the world, played bigshot. After all the years and all the time, I never had a vacation, so I disappeared for a year or two and then at that

Hey, talent's talent and all of these wrestlers are individuals and nuts and one way or another, because you have to be to do this, so if the promoters would just the guys be who they are, that's when people get into them. Then wrestling would be back to it's super heyday. Because of the cables and the networks and the pay-per-views, it would be bigger than ever, as big as football. McMahon won't let the guys be themselves. He tells them what to be. That's why I knock him. They try to be something they're not and that's why they do such sh-- ass jobs.

time, I didn't want to get back involved in the business.

Keller: Do you communicate with Bruno today?

Zbyszko: No. There's some animosity there.

Keller: What do you think of David Sammartino?

Zbyszko: David is a frustrated young guy. He's a tough son of a bitch. I think Dave's problem is because his father had such a big name that people expected as much of Dave and Dave isn't that big of a guy. In fact, I think now he's 200 pounds or so. He's cut and he's in great shape. He's a hell of a guy and a good performer, but I think people are disappointed because he's not the 260-pound gorilla his father was. So I think he's frustrated over that. He's had some tough breaks.

Keller: Do you think Greg Gagne faced the same hurdles?

Zbyszko: Oh, yes. Exactly the same. Because Greg was a real good athlete and a hell of a wrestler. He could fly around and thrill crowds left and right, but in terms of drawing big money, he just wasn't that big of a guy. Not that you have to be that big, because I'm not super big. But you have to have a look and being Verne Gagne's son, the first thing they look at is he's not as big as his

dad. And that kills you in the eyes of the public. As silly as that is and as meaningless as it is, really.

Keller: What do you attribute to the downfall of the AWA over the years?

Zbyszko: It's really not a downfall. All that Verne did was basically save a lot of money and not go bankrupt and out of business like the Crocketts did. The Crocketts tried to maintain a level and chase McMahon in his heyday and they lost so much money, their mother wouldn't let them lose any more. And Verne was actually the smartest of them all because he cut back to what people thought was virtually nothing, but at least there's still the AWA and there's no (Jim Crockett Promotions). So who's smarter? It doesn't matter what the people think. Verne's still got a lot of things cooking and if things click, he will be what people consider big time again. But in reality, he was a hell of a lot smarter than the Crocketts. Verne's a hell of a smart man in the wrestling business and he knew what not to do to save his ass and be able to survive. And he outlasted the Crocketts.

With the reality of this business, thanks to idiots like (Dave) Meltzer and those who write a bunch of trash, everybody thinks they know the wrestling business and the reality is, besides me and a couple of other guys, nobody knows the wrestling business. I listen to some of the rumors that go around and some of these cheat sheets. It's great to know people care so much about wrestling that they'll get that involved in wanting to know that much, but they're all on the wrong goddamn track. Even Meltzer who thinks he's so damn smart will write something about me. He'll say, "Gee, Zbyszko stalls. He had a stalling match." And then he'll write, "But he can sure excite a crowd." How stupid can he be? I mean, if the bell rings and I start flying them up, people will ask why I'm flying them up. They have no idea. How the hell can I excite a crowd if I don't know what I'm doing? You can't.

The only thing I think about Dave Meltzer is this: For any credibility, he has no business writing anything. If anybody has business writing an inside scoop sheet on wrestling, it would be like me, or Flair, or Bruno, or Verne. For Dave Meltzer to write anything is absurd. I never really see them anymore because to me to read Dave Meltzer is nothing.

Keller: How do you think wrestling should be covered in the magazines?

Zbyszko: The magazines tend to take things into unreality. I've read articles about me. And because I'm from Pittsburgh, they write. "Larry Zbyszko built his muscles working hard in a coal mine." I've never seen a goddamn coal mine. But because I'm from Pittsburgh, they say I'm a coalminer. If I was from Texas they'd say, "Larry Zbyszko got his muscles wrestling steer." They write that instead of writing Larry Zbyszko got his background because he kicked ass at Penn State and should've been in the Olympics but he smacked the assistant dean. He's a tough wrestler and was trained by one of the best wrestlers in the business. Instead of saying stuff legit which would be truthful and people would say, "No wonder he's a tough wrestler," they say I built my muscles in the coal mine. That

tells the people some slob from the coal mines can be a wrestler. So the magazines, they're good because it's publicity, but it's so stupid. It's kind of like reading the *Star*.

Keller: Do you think there could be a happy medium between what Meltzer sets out to do and the magazine's current policies?

Zbyszko: The only media thing is the magazines have to cover what happens so the people get the straight scoop. But where everybody gets so stupid is because the promoters promote stupid stuff. If the promoter... I'll give you an example. Take Rick Steiner. If they promoted Rick Steiner as what he was, a tough son of a bitch, then the magazines would have to cover him as a tough son of a bitch. Instead, they have Steiner running around talking to his hand. So then the magazines are saying, "Here's Rick Steiner with his buddy, whatever his name is, he talks to him." So people say, "Here's this idiot talking to his hand." Instead of the magazines saying what a tough bastard he is, because he is. There's no need for that sh--. They think if you take a tough athlete you have to give him a dimension, like Randy Savage, you have to have him dress up and talk weird. When it's the same talent. Or a Ted DiBiase, instead of having a great match, he has to strut around the ring dressed like a penguin talking about all the money he has. So you don't have to make it silly. Make them what they are.

Keller: How about Bill Watts. Do you admire his promoting style?

Zbyszko: I never worked for Watts. I heard things. Bill Watts, from what I hear, he'll stay on a guy's ass to stay a tough and legitimate athlete. If he does that, then yes, I do like him. His territory, I never went to Mickey Mouse territories. I wasn't going to work for Bill Watts and drive 3,000 miles a week. Like I said, I made a lot of money so I don't have to do that.

Keller: What is your most memorable moment as a wrestler?

Zbyszko: There's two of them, really. The bigger the crowd, the bigger the thrill, the bigger the achievement. The two big thrills I had is number one the time I walked out in Shea Stadium against Bruno. Because it was nothing but me and Bruno that drew 45,000 people in a day when the only wrestling you could see in New York was on a local station at Midnight. That's how good it was. Nowadays, they're not even selling out the Garden with 5,000 hours a week of TV. And the other moment, I walked into Tokyo, Japan as the AWA World Heavyweight Champion and I walked out in front of 70,000 in the TokyoDome and blew the roof off the place. That was a thrilling moment.

Keller: Is there a third moment since those two were so easy?

Zbyszko: Those were the two biggest. There's been so many silly moments. To have a third when those two were at such a high level, other things seem so Mickey Mouse. There were so many great experiences, but none nearly as great as those two. Hopefully, what my third biggest thrill will be is to make another one as great as those two. That's what I'm working on with Turner.

TORCH SIDEBAR

REFLECTIONS ON TORCH TALKS

Sean Waltman: At the time of this interview in 1992, Waltman wasn't sure if he'd ever get a full-time job in WCW or the WWF. He was considering that he might have to spend years in Japan and Mexico and the U.S. independent scene before being taken seriously by the WWF or WCW. It turned out a short time later the WWF gave him a break and he took full advantage of it. His Raw feud with Razor Ramon is one of the most memorable in the early years of Raw. After his first WWF stint, he moved on to work for WCW, then he returned to the WWF after getting fired from WCW. While his slender build is still an issue, he has more than overcome that and is a legitimate star in the WWF today. During the interview he talks about not wanting to take steroids. However, since that interview took place, he did go through an addiction to pain killers. Since then he has been through rehab and all indications are he has stayed away from them ever since. During the interview, it came across that a key to getting over given his size was doing high-flying moves. Now, seven years later, he rarely climbs to the top rope as part of his repertoire.

Bill Watts: This 1991 "Torch Talk" is regarded as the interview that got Bill Watts in the door in WCW. His confidence and bravado was backed up by years of promoting a popular, hardcore style of wrestling in the Mid-South territory. He would end up getting hired by WCW, but his stint in the position Eric Bischoff now holds was a disaster. There were hints that he wouldn't be able to fit into the corporate structure. He said in the interview unless he got a blessing from Ted Turner personally, he wouldn't want the job because it would just be another corporate animal. For Watts to be tolerated by the corporate structure, he would have had to be enormously successful—and quickly. Instead, he was seen quickly as being a hot-headed fossil who wasn't willing or able to adapt to even the most basic elements of the corporate structure.

Bill Watts #2: The second interview, conducted about a year after the first interview, was done right after WCW hired him. Within the first week or so of being hired, he was already being scrutinized and criticized for bullying tactics in trying to lower WCW's budget. When pressed whether his pay would go up if he could get wrestlers to agree to be paid less than their contracts state, he refused to answer the questions. He knew that if his pay went up if wrestlers' pay went down, he would have a much tougher time convincing wrestlers to accept a pay cut. He also showed an old-style mentality in wanting to build up the attendance at the Omni while wanting to cut back on PPVs because he felt WCW was overexposed. His philosophy was going in the opposite direction of the industry—which was moving toward more PPVs and more TV hours. My relationship with Watts would deteriorate further over the next few months as he grew more frustrated with the lack of success he was having. He ended up fired from WCW in part because racial views he expressed in a "Torch Annual" crossed the desk of TBS executive Hank Aaron.

Larry Zbyszko: Zbyszko made it clear in this interview he was his own number one fan. He wouldn't admit to having any flaws... It's strange that nine years ago Zbyszko said Flair was entering a Golden Age... Larry isn't running WCW, but he is watching wrestlers from the announcing desk...

